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Life Values As The Basis For Understanding Human Rights

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Abstract

The traditional system of upbringing in Latvia, focused on the development of values, has turned out to be ineffective. Imposing moral values upon young people has resulted in their rejection and increasing lack of spirituality. The representatives of traditional pedagogy are not interested in individual experience and the inner world of children. They are still focused on the perfection of the instruments of pedagogic influence upon children in accordance with social rules, norms, and values. There is a need for changes in the system of upbringing. The old pedagogical thinking and socio-centred approach to children - "towards children with social values" - have to be replaced by new pedagogic thinking and a humanistic people-oriented approach - "with a child towards social values." The development of life values promotes the understanding of human rights as well.

Introduction

The study of educational issues concerning human rights is very topical in Latvia. Despite the fact that Latvia has acquired considerable experience in human rights education, there has not been any systemic analysis of human rights education so far. It is necessary to carry out academic studies of this issue in various fields of knowledge in order to build a system of human rights education and create the culture of human rights as one of the value-based cornerstones in contemporary Latvia. However, there are several contradictions to be noted.

Human Rights Declaration as the highest value, on the one hand, and the reality of everyday life where the violations of economic, social, and civil rights can be observed destroys people's faith in the possibility of exercising and protection of their rights. In Latvia, non-citizens are deprived of the right to elect even the local government and to be elected. Disparity between the regulatory declarations and the actual situation in human rights education is the principal contradiction in the system of education in Latvia. The society has great expectations for schools, which can develop an attitude to human rights as a value.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the key educational issues related to human rights and to study the attitude of senior secondary school students to human rights as a construct referring to the world outlook.

Human Rights Education

The international community has no doubt that education makes a significant contribution to the realization of human rights. Provisions concerning human rights education have been included in many international documents. About forty various documents have been passed by the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and OSCE with regard to education in the area of human rights and freedom.

The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia guarantees each citizen the right to education, which includes the positive responsibility of the state to set up the education system, as well as the negative responsibility not to interfere in the practical execution of these rights (Constitution, 2004).

A topical issue is the content of human rights education. In 1994, the international community arrived at a common understanding of the term "human rights education." It was reflected in the "Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004). Later, this concept was further developed and extended in the World Programme for Human Rights Education in 2005. According to these documents, human rights education can be defined as training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills and the moulding of attitudes (Plan of Action, 1994).

It is very important to bear in mind that human rights education refers not only to the academic transfer of knowledge, but also includes, in line with the approach of both the United Nations and the Council of

Europe, the system of values to be adhered to as well as practical actions. Activity is an integral part of human rights education. Thus, human rights education comprises:

- knowledge and skills – studies of fundamental human rights and the mechanisms ensuring their protection as well as the acquisition of skills how to exercise these rights in everyday life;
- values, the world outlook, and behavioural models;
- actions – taking practical measures to protect human rights and to reward studies in this area (Azarov, 2008).

The underlying ideas of the concept of human rights are quite personal. This idea is particularly emphasized in the World Programme for Human Rights Education adopted by the Council of Europe. The programme is focused on promoting equality and human dignity. It outlines the general objectives for human rights education:

- to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- to develop a sense of individual self-respect and respect for others: a value for human dignity;
- to develop attitudes and behaviour that will lead to respect for the rights of others;
- to promote respect, understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity;
- to empower people towards more active citizenship (Compass, 2002).

The Culture of Human Rights as a Value for Senior Secondary School Students

Based on international documents concerning human rights education, the content of the notion “the culture of human rights for senior secondary school students” in Latvia includes the following components:

- cognitive culture (knowledge of human rights and the mechanisms ensuring their protection);
- axiological culture (personal values);
- activity culture (ability to apply the knowledge concerning human rights in practical activities; behavioural models).

Interconnection of all the components given above determines the culture of human rights for an individual. It has to be noted that human rights education, according to the United Nations, is aimed at the creation of a universal culture of human rights.

This study shows that axiological culture, i.e. the values of a learner, is the dominating component in the content of the culture of human rights (Chehlova, 2002).

The experiment was carried out in three Russian-speaking secondary schools in Latvia characterised by various forms in the organization of the educational process: Pushkin Lyceum providing specialization in certain areas, secondary school No 34 specialising in the English language studies, and an ordinary secondary school. The participants of the experiment were senior form students aged 18-20 (180 people) and teachers of these secondary schools (90 people).

The purpose of the experiment was to determine the individual culture of human rights among senior form students. One of the objectives of the experiment was to analyse the values of senior secondary school students and their attitude to human rights and freedoms. This analysis is the core of the present article. Another important objective of the experiment was to work out methodology to study, describe, and explain human rights.

First of all, new trends in human rights education were taken into account, according to which new methodologies were developed:

- axiological approach to knowledge, i.e. imparting value-based meaning to various manifestations of rights;
- an integrated approach to the study of human rights;
- recognition of pluralism with regard to the models of human rights;
- linking of the universal character of human rights with the specific socio-cultural traditions of different people;
- an intercultural dialogue; borrowing and mutual influence in forming universal human notions on human rights and human dignity;
- raising the awareness of the practical usefulness of scientific knowledge.

These were the key objectives during the establishing stage of the experiment. The main objective of the forming stage of the experiment, which has not been finished yet, was to develop the attitude of senior secondary school students to freedom and human rights as values.

A survey was conducted in order to clarify what values senior-form students choose and what values are personally significant to them. A list of various values: spiritual, practical, focused on self, focused on other people, and focused on communication was offered to the students. The students selected the values personally significant for them. The most significant ones were rated as 3, less significant ones as 2, and the insignificant ones as 1. The results are presented in the following table.

The Ranking of Life Values According to their Significance by Students from Various Institutions of Secondary Education

	Pushkin Lyceum		Riga Secondary School No 34		Riga Secondary School No 29	
	Coefficient	Rank	Coefficient	Rank	Coefficient	Rank
1. Active life	0.58	10	0.14	14	0.58	7
2. Wisdom	0.06	13	0.04	17	0.52	9
3. Health	0.5	11	0.7	6	0.9	5
4. Interesting work	0.92	3	0.68	8	0.5	8
5. Natural beauty and art	0	14	0.12	15	0.04	17
6. Love	0.78	4	0.9	3	0.9	6
7. Materially well-provided life	0.96	1	1	1	0.94	1
8. Good trusted friends	0.7	6	1	2	0.9	4
9. Social acknowledgment	0	15	0.18	11	0.08	15
10. Cognition	0.6	9	0.66	9	0.04	16
11. Career	0.94	2	0.94	4	0.52	10
12. Self-perfection	0.68	7	0.24	10	0.52	11
13. Entertainment	0	16	0.84	5	0.94	2
14. Freedom and human rights	0.5	12	0.14	13	0.5	13
15. Happy family life	0.68	8	0.82	6	0.94	3
16. Happiness of others	0	17	0.12	16	0.02	18
17. Creativity	0	18	0.16	12	0.12	14
18. Self-confidence	0.78	5	0.4	18	0.52	12

Analysis of the results showed that interesting work, materially well-provided life, and career are the most significant values for the lyceum students. Good friends, self-confidence and love also occupy leading positions in the scale of value orientations, while the values like freedom, health, happy family life, cognition, active life, and wisdom seem to be less significant. Social acknowledgment, the happiness of others, entertainment, creativity, natural beauty and art are not the main goals of human life, according to the lyceum students.

Similarly, the students of Riga Secondary School No 34 do not consider social acknowledgment, the happiness of other people, entertainment, natural beauty, and art as the key life values. The students of this school consider love, materially well-provided life, and career as significant values. Good trusted friends, interesting work, and happy family life occupy leading positions in the scale of value orientations. Less significant values are: self-confidence, health, self-perfection, freedom, active life, and cognition.

The students of ordinary secondary schools do not consider values like development, active life, social cognition, the happiness of others, creativity, natural beauty and art as significant values. Materially well-provided life, health and happy family life appear to be more significant to them. Good trusted friends, love and entertainment also occupy leading positions in the scale of value orientations. Interesting work, self-confidence, active life, freedom, self-perfection, career, the happiness of other people are less significant values.

The analysis of the results of the survey showed that freedom and human rights are not considered as significant values by senior secondary school students. The reasons of this given by the students were quite similar: "I can't change anything in the state and its legal system." This answer referred to the political rights.

Then, the students' attention was drawn to the cultural rights – the right to education. At present, due to the financial crisis, the number of students in the institutions of higher education whose studies will be funded by the state budget is significantly reduced. Students have to pay for higher education, and it is not so easy for them to take loans. Therefore, the opinion of senior secondary school students is quite pessimistic. Many of them want to leave the country after finishing school. Consequently, the low level of human rights in the scale of significant values among senior secondary school students is connected with the socio-cultural and economic situation in Latvia.

Conclusions

The discrepancy between formal declarations and the actual situation in human rights education in Latvia leads to the conclusion that it is necessary, first of all, to develop the culture of human rights as one of the value-based cornerstones in contemporary Latvia as well as to create the system of human rights education. The analysis of the culture of human rights as a personality feature of senior secondary school students resulted in the conclusion that it is necessary to start human rights education at an earlier age, during adolescence.

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