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Intercultural education in Latvia

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Abstract

Latvia's accession to the European Union changed the economic, political and educational situation in the country. The enlargement of the system of united European cooperation, the intensive exchange of information, products, and workforce poses a new task for the system of education to prepare young people capable of participating in European-scale projects, associations, and partnerships. These positive changes resulted in the reorganization of the traditional system of education and the development of intercultural education. The purpose of intercultural education is the development of intercultural personality capable of mutual acceptance of individual's national and cultural identity, a mobile personality capable of engaging in active cooperation with the representatives of various cultures. Intercultural education is based on universal cultural values like freedom, cooperation, tolerance, and others. Latvia is a multiethnic country. Intercultural education has to deal with a two-fold task here: the acquisition by young people of their own ethnic culture and the development of respect for other cultures. The contemporary Latvian culture is an aggregate formed as a result of the interaction of different cultures, the space of human coexistence. The article deals with the concept and the didactic models of intercultural education developed on the basis of the principles of integration, interdisciplinarity, and tolerance. The main forms of intercultural education are: projects (local and international), practice, and research. The experiment was carried out in several schools in Latvia and a gymnasium in Norway. The purpose of the article is to analyse the specific features of intercultural education in Latvia and to determine the trends of its development.

Key words: *Intercultural education, National and cultural identity, Interactivity, Interdisciplinarity*

Introduction

The entrance of Latvia into the European Union has changed economic, political and educational situation in the country. The expansion of the system of pan-European collaboration, intensive exchange of information, labour products and work force, have placed before the education system the task of preparing young people for collaboration in European joint projects, unions, and different associations. These positive changes have caused the reorganization of the traditional system of education, and the creation of

'Intercultural Education'. The purpose of intercultural education is the training of the intercultural personality, capable of the mutual acknowledgement of nation- cultural identity, mobile personality, active in the organization of partnership with the representatives of different cultures (Livermore, 1998). The bases of intercultural education are the general cultural values: freedom, collaboration, tolerance and others. Latvia is a multinational state. Intercultural education here has to solve the dual problem: mastery by the young generation of its national culture and training the respect for the values of other cultures. Contemporary culture in Latvia is the totality of the interacting cultures, the space of human co-existence.

Aims and objectives of intercultural education

The intercultural education in Latvia can be defined as one of the trends in development of contemporary pedagogical theory and practice, which is based on the need of person's preparation for the life under the conditions of multi-cultural, rapidly changing, more and more integrated world. Intercultural education performs the basic purpose: training the intercultural personality, which combines in itself national and European identities. This goal is achieved because of the solution of the specific tasks:

- To mould the students' world outlook, according to which a person recognizes and values the unity of the world, and creates their place in it;
- The development of cross- cultural knowledge (knowledge of the culture of other peoples);
- To give the young generation pride in their national culture and training to respect the values of other cultures;
- The formation of positive attitude to another person, to the world (empathy, tolerance, etc) (Neimatov, 2002).

Although the concept of intercultural education acquires theoretical and practical significance in the poly-ethnic and multicultural society in Latvia, in the pedagogical theory and practice of Latvia the system of intercultural education is still in the stage of formation. Undoubtedly, under the conditions of the contemporary historical cultural situation, when the dialogue becomes a 'universal all-encompassing method of the realization of culture and a person within the culture' (Kagan, 1998, p 404), the integration strategy, which implies the restoration of the balance between the positive and *ethnocultural* identity and the *ethnocultural* tolerance, can become the guarantee of social and ethnic peace in any multicultural society, including Latvia (Berry, 1997). These ideas lie in the basis of developing the system of intercultural education in Latvia.

As a result of the change of the socio-political situation in Latvia, the problem of the development of European cultural identity has become especially urgent. Educational system is to bring up the citizen of Europe, who feels personal responsibility for the solution of the intercultural problems, and can collaborate with the representatives of other cultures in different projects, organizations, unions (Ross, 2002).

Intercultural education model

At the end of the 20th century individuality of a person began to be considered as a value in the philosophy of education. The role of education acquired new sense - to ensure to a person understanding and feeling of his/her own uniqueness and at the same time understanding of human community and unity. A shift in the meanings of education caused the new understanding of the content of education. Researchers came to the conclusion that the humanitarian culture reflects the interactive tendencies of education.

The value of humanitarian culture lies in the fact that it by all accessible to it means - theoretical, practical, pedagogical and artistic - asserts and forms in the consciousness of society the idea of the highest value of a person.

Humanitarian culture is that unique social mechanism transmitting spiritual values and social experience from one generation to the next. The essential features of humanitarian culture makes it possible to formulate the following most important characteristic functions of it: culture-identifiable, value-oriented, norm-oriented (guarantee of social and individual standards of behaviour and forms of moral control through the responsibility, the duty, conscience and others), social-consolidating, and individualizing (Kagan, 1998).

The culture-identifiable function is achieved through 'the texts' of the humanitarian culture, which form the cultural identity of new generations, national self-consciousness and intercultural consciousness. *Dialog* (or even poly-consistency) is the natural property of humanitarian culture. Humanitarian culture, being the concentrated form of self-consciousness of society, includes the value-oriented dominants, which compose the basis and a specific character of nation-cultural mentality and the idea of the unity of peoples – 'Europe is our common home'. The function of social integration reflects the ability of humanitarian culture to harmonise the spiritual world of a person, and also optimize the cooperation of a person with the world, community, and another person (Lotman, 1992).

Researchers have come to the conclusion that the creative potential of humanitarian culture should necessarily be used in the educational process as its meaningful basis. On the basis of the theoretical analysis of the cultural phenomenon, the content of humanitarian culture can be represented as the interrelation of the following components: cognitive, normative, operational, and value- semantic.

The content models of education in Latvia are in general knowledge-centred, i.e. their dominant is knowledge, which determines the cognitive educational trend.

The crisis of education and the analysis of the functions of humanitarian culture have made it possible to come to the conclusion that the new model of the content of education is necessary. It is a culture-centred model, in which the values dominate. It is important to re-orientate education from the knowledge-centred to the culture-centred, which will make a person not only educated in terms of knowledge, but also with respect to cultural and spiritual dimensions, it will make him/her think, and will aim not merely at the mastery of knowledge, but also at creativity.

The main directions of the perfection of the content of the education are: the realization of the principle of humanitarian problematisation in the teaching of all sciences, focusing attention on the moral-ideological aspects of culture, strengthening of interdisciplinary links, use in the teaching not only the methodology of the natural sciences, but also humanities, strengthening of the emotional aspect of instruction, the inclusion of the problems of the world and domestic culture, philosophy, and economy in the content of the education (Chehlov, 2008). The result of training is the development of intercultural personality. On this basis the model of intercultural education has been developed.

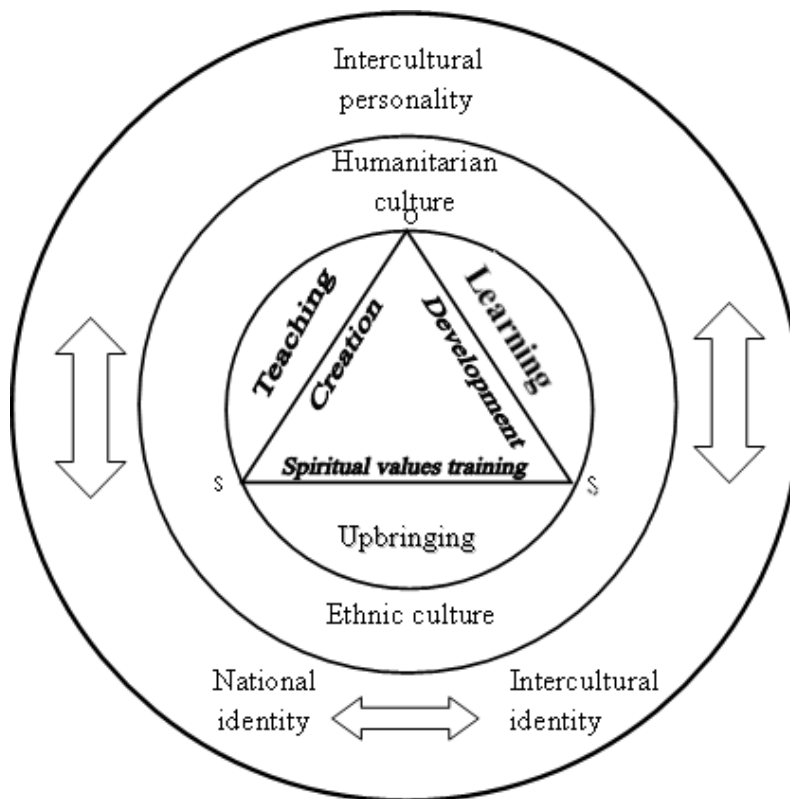


Fig. 1 The model of intercultural education (Based on Chehlov, 2008, p 15)

Developing the model of intercultural education in Latvia, we proceeded from a shift from the dominance of content in education. This is no longer knowledge, but rather values. We also took into account a change in the essence and trends of the content of education - this is

humanitarian culture. The culture, aimed at the development of the spirituality of a person (Chagilov, 2000). On this basis the subjective components of educational process have been concretized. Culture-spiritual values, creation-self-determination, development-self-development have been singled out. Based on that, the model of intercultural education has been developed. Its meaningful aspect is represented as follows: objective subject areas are detailed (teaching, learning, up-bringing). Humanitarian and national culture comprises its meaningful basis. And as a general result, there is the development of the national and intercultural identity of students, as well as, the development of the intercultural personality.

The approbation of the model of intercultural education

The model of intercultural education has been realized in the study process of Pushkin Lyceum. The meaningful aspect of the model had three directions:

- Humanitarian problematisation of the content of all study subjects;
- Scientific research activity in different projects;
- The organization of profile education and practice (Chehlov, 2008).

The most interesting and effective method of the actualization of intercultural experience of the students was scientific research activity in the Latvian and international projects. For all that, it is necessary to emphasize that by the main focus for this scientific research activity we considered not to be the scientific result *per se*, but the realization of the creative potential of one's personality, familiarizing with the cultural heritage, entry into the world of the multicultural values of society, the development of intercultural experience. In Pushkin Lyceum the seminars for the organization of scientific research were carried out. Seminars were carried out by the professors and lecturers of the University of Latvia. The essence and the structure of scientific research (the object of the research, aim, hypothesis, experiment, the analysis of the obtained results, the defence of a work) were analysed. Experimental work was aimed at the development of creation and collaboration in the process of scientific research activity, the formation of mutual understanding with the advisor and the participants of the scientific project. Usually Latvian and Russian schools participated in the process.

With the fulfilment by the students of scientific research work the role of a teacher in the educational process qualitatively changes. In all stages of work preparation the teacher appears in the role of a consultant and an assistant, but not an expert. In this case, the point of teaching in the project stage is not on the content of study as the main goal ('what is to be done?'), but on the process of the existing knowledge application ('to know how'). Unfortunately, today not every teacher is professionally ready to include the method of research projects into his arsenal of pedagogical technologies.

The role of the students also changes: they come out not as passive extras, but as active participants in the process; activity in the working groups helps them to learn to work in "a team", to collaborate in the group. In this case the formation of productive critical thinking occurs inevitably. During the research students work out their own analytical point of view

on the information, where the evaluation scheme 'this is correct, and this is incorrect' (bad and the like) 'does not work' any more. For all that, the students are free in the selection of methods and forms of the activity for the achievement of their goal, no one can indicate to them as to what and how should be done, they should know how to negotiate by themselves.

It was especially interesting for the students to work in the international research projects. For example, the project 'Students' Studying Motivation in Latvia and Norway' had been organized. The students of 11-12 forms of Pushkin Lyceum (50 people) and the high school students of 11-12 classes of Laksevagas Gymnasium in Norway (48 people) participated in this project. The conceptual apparatus of the experiment was developed:

Subject of research: study process in Pushkin Lyceum and Laksevagas Gymnasium.

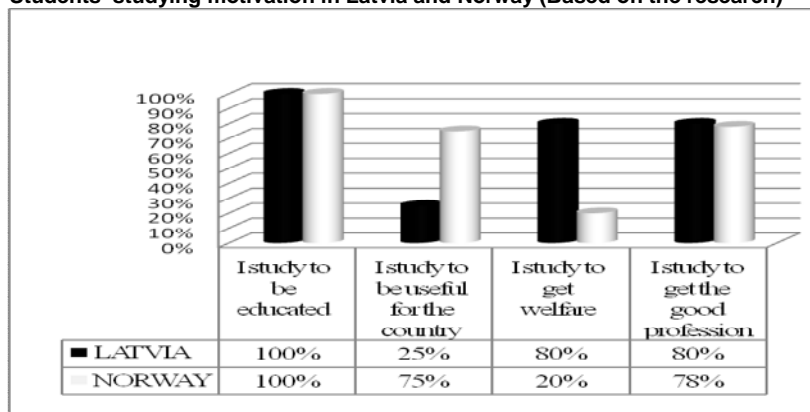
Object of research: motivation for study for the students of Latvia and Norway.

Aim of research: to identify the specific character of the motivation for study for the students of Latvia and Norway.

The *methods* of the research were determined: questioning, testing, statistically-mathematical methods for the processing of the results. The test 'I learn, in order to...' was carried out. The variants of answers to choose from were offered: to become an educated person, to be useful for their country, to be well off, to become the citizen of Europe, to get to know a lot of new information, etc. The second test 'A modern person is someone who...' and an argumentative essay 'Europe is our common home' were offered as well.

The results were interesting for all students. In the motivation for study there was much in common. All students want to become educated people, they are eager to learn something new. But there were also differences. The motive 'I study to get welfare' was more important for the Latvian students. The number of Latvian students, who had chosen that motive, was twice that of students in Norway. But the motive 'I want to perfect my knowledge to be useful for the society' was more essential for the Norwegian students. The amount of respondents, who had preferred that motive, in Norway turned out to be considerably more, namely two times more.

The lyceum students of Latvia drew the conclusion that the socio-political situation influenced the development of the motivation for study. The motive 'I want to become the citizen of Europe' was significant for the students of Latvia, as 100% of students had selected that motive. In comparison in Norway only 20% had chosen that variant. Why? Because in Latvia 40% of the population do not have citizenship. These are mainly the representatives of Russian-speaking minorities. And, naturally, the students want to become the citizens of Europe. The Norwegian students do not face this problem at all.

Table 1. Students' studying motivation in Latvia and Norway (Based on the research)

Friendly relations were established among the students of Latvia and Norway, as they all were interested in the results of the common research work. They communicated in the English and Norwegian languages (a few lyceum students studied two years in Norway). Together they developed the evaluation criteria of their scientific research work.

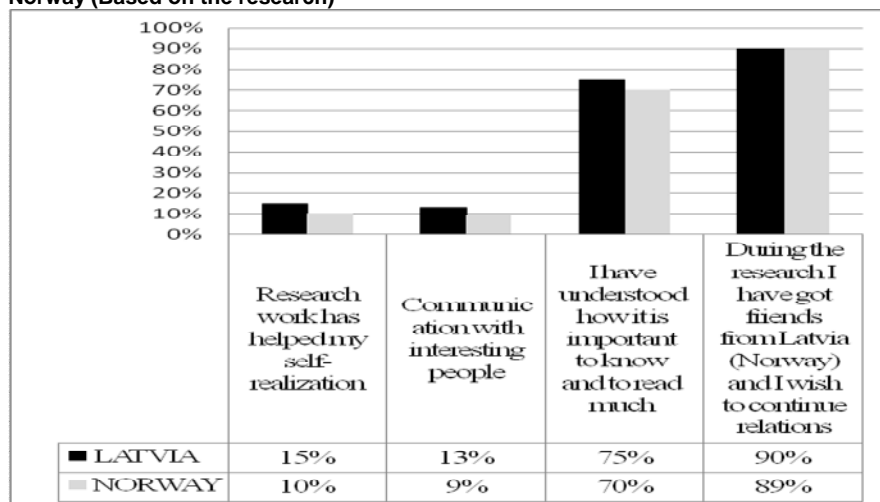
Table 2. Evaluation criteria of students' scientific research work (Based on the research)

| | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Conceptual apparatus of the research: completeness and accuracy, the correspondence to the theme of the research | | |
| The object | 1 point | 6 points |
| The aim | 1 point | |
| Hypothesis | 1 point | |
| Tasks | 1 point | |
| Research methods | 1 point | |
| Research base | 1 point | |
| Theoretical background of the research | | |
| Analysis of the literature | 2 points | |

| | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Accuracy of the problem definition and logics of argumentation | 2 points | 4 points |
| Practical part of the research | | |
| The correspondence to the hypothesis | 1 point | 6 points |
| The choice of the research methods | 3 points | |
| Analysis of the obtained results | 2 points | |
| Conclusions | | 2 points |
| List of literature | | 2 points |
| Appendices | | 2 points |
| Total | | 24 points |

Friendly relations continue also after the completion of the project. New ideas and new projects appear.

Table 3. The research work influence on student's intercultural identity development in Latvia and Norway (Based on the research)



Thus, using scientific research in the educational process we obtained several results. First of all, this is a pedagogical effect from the students' involvement in 'the acquisition of knowledge' and their logical application: the formation of personal qualities (tolerance, empathy), the development of motivation, reflection, self-appraisal, teaching of selection, the

comprehension of both the consequences of this selection and the results of their own activity. And what is very important - the realization of the general values: collaboration, mutual understanding and support. Secondly, the fulfilled scientific research project itself. It should be added, that not the amount of the mastered information ('what has been studied'), but the application of information ('how it has been used') for the achievement of the stated goal, has been evaluated. And finally the main result is the development of intercultural personality, a citizen of Europe.

Conclusion

The most important result of the conducted theoretical-experimental research is the development of the basis of intercultural education. This basis comprises the humanitarian culture, which ensures unity and interrelation of knowledge and values in the pedagogical process. On the basis of the interrelation of objective and subjective components the model of intercultural education has been developed.

Statistical data, obtained in the result of experimental teaching, make it possible to claim, that the effective method of the actualization of the intercultural experience of students, is the scientific research activity in different projects, where the dialogue is considered as the only productive method of cultural interaction. Under research conditions the teaching becomes the special form of communication, where a teacher and a student appear as communicators of the dialogue relation 'student - advisor – student', during which the teacher becomes the facilitator of the student's interests and creative abilities, which makes it possible to perceive by the students the results of their activity as their own contribution to the culture, and enriches their intercultural experience.

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