Intercultural Dialogue as a basis for the development of Citizenship

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Abstract

Intercultural dialogue is a key factor in the education of citizens: the acknowledgement of equal rights and equal value of other individuals who have a different culture and world outlook. Understanding these differences, and accepting them, is the basis for any multicultural society, including Latvia. Latvia is a multicultural society in which various minority ethnic communities live alongside the title nation. In conditions of social and political transformations, the ethnic and cultural minorities experience a crisis of social identity, which manifests itself as 'the stress of acculturation' the psychological essence of which is the disruption of the close ties between positive ethno-cultural identity and ethno-cultural citizenship.

Latvia is a multicultural society in which various minority ethnic communities live alongside the title nation. In conditions of social and political transformations, the ethnic and cultural minorities experience a crisis of social identity, which manifests itself as 'the stress of acculturation' (Berry 1997), the psychological essence of which is the disruption of the close ties between positive ethno-cultural identity and ethno-cultural citizenship.

The social and political changes brought to the foreground the issue of the development of citizenship. At the turn of the 21st century, it became clear that the future of Latvia was closely connected with intercultural dialogue and the enhancement of economic potential.

Intercultural dialogue is considered as a key factor in the education of citizens. This is connected to specific features of intercultural dialogue, based on the acknowledgement of equal rights and equal value of other individuals who have a different culture and world outlook. Understanding these differences, and accepting them, is the basis for any multicultural society, including Latvia.

In traditional monolingual education, otherness (as a personal view of the world) is not important and not necessary. A monologue can do very well without others. A dialogue, on the other hand, is the only form of communication where an individual is treated as a personality preserving his/her freedom and independence. Focusing on dialogue, and recognizing it as the basis of relationships in the educational process, implies the acceptance of the existence of different positions as having the same value. In order to understand another individual, it is necessary to know his/her culture and develop a positive attitude not only to one's own culture, but also to that of another nation.

These ideas formed the basis for research on the development of citizenship for senior secondary school students, carried out in a Russian lyceum.

The purpose of the research was to develop the content of citizenship as an integrative feature of personality and to determine the role of the intercultural dialogue in the development of citizenship for senior secondary school students.

The Content of Citizenship as a Personality Feature

Citizenship is considered as an integrative feature of personality, as an acquired value. We take into account the view of Frank, who answering the question, 'How can we hand over values in the process of education or give students something like the meaning of life?' said, '…we can not learn values; we have to emotionally experience them' (Frank 1992, p 67).

Compared to particular psychic functions like memory, emotions, and attention, emotional experience refers to an activity aimed at changing the inner world of an individual and the exposure of the system of emotional perception, thinking, and action. Thus, we consider emotional experience as a form of facilitating interpersonal communication of the participants of educational interaction (Rogers 1995) on the one hand, and as a form of cognition aimed at emotional value acquisition of the educational material on the other hand, thus ensuring the simultaneous development of both learners' intellect and affective features (Vygotsky 1968).

The transformation of objective cultural values into personal ones is not possible without the involvement of senior secondary school students themselves, without their activity aimed at the acquisition of the cultural values of a society. It is not enough to know that there exists good, justice, and compassion – each individual has to discover these values for himself/herself in the process of his/her spiritual development and to actualise these values in the conditions of everyday life. The views of Bibner and his followers are important in this respect: they argue that the development of a learner can be considered not as the acquisition of norms and the picture of the world common to everybody, but as self-formation, as a search for oneself through dialogue with cultural communication partners. Developing an ability to engage in an intercultural dialogue is held to be a dominant element in the development of citizenship. These ideas formed the basis for the development of the content of citizenship. The following components were singled out:

- The cognitive component – the knowledge of civic duty, one's own role in the social life of Latvia, the specific features of Latvian and Russian cultures, the essence of the cultural dialogue;
- The affective component – a positive emotional attitude to being a member of Latvian society and to obtaining Latvian citizenship;
- The behavioural action component – a need to be able to participate in the actual cultural and social life of Latvia.

Organisation of the educational process based on intercultural dialogue

The organisation of educational processes implies working in two interrelated directions – the development of the intercultural dialogue and the formation of citizenship.

The first direction refers to the humanitarian approach to education, that is the direction towards the individual. Within the framework of school subjects, this direction manifests itself first as the incorporation of humanitarian issues in the content of education; and second as the implementation of a cultural component, consisting of four elements:

- Subject content, including the cultural experience of humanity (in the form of knowledge);
- Action content in the system of culture (forms of action, skills);
- Learners' personal socio-cultural experience, the system of relationships manifesting itself in cultural needs and value orientations;
- Teacher's socio-cultural experience.

However, it is not possible to limit ourselves to this extensive approach to the solution of the problem since the relations between a teacher and a learner do not undergo any radical transformations in this case. The extensive approach to humanitarian education has to be supplemented by an intensive component as well. In this case, humanitarian education is implemented not only within the framework of the subject content, but also within the logic of the educational process. It is necessary for the educational process to be creative and focused on an individual. Thus, it implies a different attitude to a learner, who is the center of the educational process, the subject of actions and relationships, and the acquisition of culture as the system of human values and meanings.

The second direction implied the involvement of students in intercultural dialogue through independent practical activity that aims to develop responsibility as an important quality of citizenship.

The first direction was implemented through lessons of humanitarian subjects. These subjects served as the source of social experience for learners, bringing them into the world of human relationships, including those of artistic images and historical figures, and facilitating the development of the cognitive and emotional basis of citizenship.

The incorporation of the cultural component of education into the educational process made it possible to organise discussions on various topical issues ('Man is the measure of all things', 'Is human dignity a value in the modern world?', 'Latvia is our common home', etc.). In a history lesson, a teacher asked students to write an essay expressing their opinion on Diesterweg's statement: 'German is my nickname, man is my name'. Students' opinions mainly focused on general human issues: 'This idea is important for Latvia; it has a universal human meaning', 'I am glad that now we are the citizens of Europe', etc. The discussion of Levy's book *The Art of Being Different* also raised considerable interest.

The second direction was implemented during students' practice. Practice is a compulsory component of each department of the lyceum. During the pedagogic practice

in the Department of Psychology and Pedagogy, we observed a new level of students' self awareness and of their understanding of their role in society. In the future, many students wanted to become teachers. The feeling of responsibility not only for themselves, but also for small children turned them into adults. The practice helped students understand the essence of teachers' profession, its significance for the transformation of the society and themselves. There was formed the motivation of an adult, the citizen of a particular society.

Naturally, professional conversations with teachers, and finding common solutions to the pedagogic problems that they encountered, led to the formation of different kinds of relationships between the lyceum students and teachers. They became colleagues interested in the successful outcome of a common task. The dialogue was the main form of learning. As a result, the lyceum students arrived at a very important conclusion: the students' dialogue with a teacher occurs in situations when they share a common professional interest. It could be said that the students and the teacher supervising their practice were united by a professional intercultural dialogue. In the lessons of the Latvian language in the elementary school where the lyceum students had their practice, they got acquainted with the methodology of teachers' work, with the techniques helping teachers to reveal the specific features of the Latvian culture: traditions, celebrations, and songs. The lyceum students had to help the schoolteachers prepare for classes: to collect materials, draw, and sing songs in the Latvian Language for the children. They engaged in a creative professional communication with the teachers, the content of which was Latvian culture. Thus, there occurred the transformation of the educational cognitive activity into a professional one; interest in the teacher's profession became the leading factor of cognitive motivation.

Communication with teachers was of particular importance for the lyceum students. While dealing with common problems, they communicated as colleagues. It was very important that the students felt exceptional interest and trust in the teachers whom they worked with during the practice. This cooperation enriched the students, and broadened their pedagogic experience and social contacts; besides this, the dialogue became the principal form of communication. There appeared a need for communication; communicative skills, self-control, and tactfulness were developed.

Four 'scales of communication' were identified:

+ interest   – nervousness
+ feedback   – aggressiveness
+ optimism   – affection
+ foresight   – liking.

This is a kind of a communicative ideal which became a guideline for the lyceum students in their own self-development.

There was a great interest in the joint conference of students' research work of the Russian and French lyceum. The majority of students in the French lyceum are Latvians, and Latvian is the principal language of instruction. Considerable preparatory work was carried out in order to organise the conference. Common creative work was a good basis

for the development of the intercultural dialogue between Latvian and Russian students. There also arose a willingness to continue this tradition in the future.

Among senior students, there could be observed a need to deepen their knowledge and understanding of their own and other cultures, as well as the need to substantiate their emotional attitude to various cultures.

The experience gained in the activities described above promoted the development of a positive attitude to the state; there appeared a desire to participate in the social life and to obtain the Latvian citizenship. For many senior students this was a very important issue. Most importantly, working with children and communicating with the teachers as colleagues helped the students understand themselves, determine their own life calling and their future. Confidence in their calling and the choice of their profession created a positive attitude to their future. This could be considered as a citizen's position.

Conclusions

The study of the issue concerning the development of citizenship in the educational process was determined by the practical importance of this issue for the development of active creative personalities. The object of research is directly related to a whole complex of significant social issues: the choice of profession, the improvement of relations among people, and the development of the intercultural dialogue.

The analysis of the theoretical ideas and the school practice carried out during the research made it possible to determine conditions for the development of citizenship of senior secondary school students. They imply appropriate pedagogic organisation of the educational process on the basis of independent creative learning and cognitive activity. This provides the freedom of self-expression and its development in research and educational-professional activities.

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