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Value Orientations as the Basis for the Development of Self-identity of Senior Secondary School Students

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Abstract

This Latvian study was of 120 teachers from three different schools: a general secondary school, a school specializing in the English language, and a lyceum school providing specialised education. There were also 240 students from forms 11 and 12 (17-18 years old). The research aimed to determine the self-identity of senior secondary school students, treating value orientations as the content-forming aspect of self-identity, and organising the educational process focused on the development of value-orientations and self-identity. The analysis of results showed that it is necessary to put more emphasis on moral aspects in the content of value orientations.

Introduction

Traditional upbringing in Latvia was focused on the imposition of values and has turned out to be ineffective. Imposing moral values on young people led to their rejection and an increasing lack of spirituality. Representatives of traditional pedagogy were not interested in the individual experiences and the inner world of children. They focused on the perfection of the instruments of pedagogic influence on children in accordance with social rules, norms, and values. There is a need for changes in such systems of upbringing. The old pedagogical thinking and socio-centred approach to children of imposing social values on children have to be replaced with new pedagogic thinking and a humanistic people-oriented approach, working with the child towards social values. This article analyses the value orientations of senior secondary school students in contemporary Latvia.

Value-orientations of senior secondary school students

Despite different approaches to understanding the essence of value orientations, all scholars agree that the content and the characteristics of the structure of the value orientations of personality determine its direction and the position of an individual regarding certain life phenomena. During adolescence there are appropriate conditions for the formation of value orientations: sufficiently high level reflection, self-regulation, consciousness of life experiences, and responsible behaviour (Dubrovina).

The idea that the development of value orientations is based on a unity between all structural components of the content of these orientations is of considerable interest. Researchers point to the interaction of three basic structural components in this context: the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural one.

The cognitive component refers to the scientific assessment of an object having a certain value. The emotional component manifests itself as the awareness of the value of an

object for society and for oneself. The behavioural component implies individual's readiness to act in a certain way about an object, as a personal value in a situation where a value-based choice has to be made. The key factor here is the awareness of personal meaningfulness of the particular situation. Dubrovina offers the following definition of this construct: "Value orientations are integrated, structurally unbroken personality formations characterised by certain regularities in the interaction of all their psychological components" (Dubrovina, 1987: 170). According to Dubrovina, each component can have its own independent role in the formation of value orientations. The existence of value orientations is an indicator of a certain stage in the development of student's personality and appearance of psychological structures which considerably facilitate the development of his/her self-identity.

However, this process is only a partial characteristic of senior secondary school students. Almost half of them only demonstrate the development of value orientations at an initial level. The dominating centre of the emotional component is the attitude to self and stable interests. In the cognitive context the dominating factor is the independent position about a world outlook. In the behavioural context, the dominating feature is the freedom of choice how to lead one's life and how to relate to the environment and other people.

Value-orientations are thus formulated attitudes towards society, other people, and oneself. In the system of attitudes (values), the attitude to man as a value and unique individuality is dominant. Senior secondary school students start organising their life on the basis of definite values. Moral relationships can be characterised as the individual's ability to build relations with others as personality, to see some value in another, and to confirm this value by building relationships with them corresponding to this value. An individual can become a free and harmoniously developed personality only through the process of forming a system of values that enables him/her to empathise with and understand the self-value of each particular individual.

Value-orientations are the basis for forming scientific and moral world outlooks, that is, the development of stable views of secondary school students about the world, themselves, and their life mission. There thus arises an acute need to tackle moral issues and to work out independent moral principles. In senior stages of secondary education we can observe not only the formation of a scientific world outlook, but also a moral outlook.

In this research, self-identity is defined as a personal formation, which manifests itself as student's awareness of the purpose and meaning of his/her life on the basis of developed values, free and the conscious choice of a future profession, and the manner of self-realization in accordance with objective self-assessment and the wish to bring benefit to others.

Value-orientations – a key criterion for self-identity in senior secondary school students

Their key features are the following:

- The system of values ("value concentration");
- Life meaning (dominating values);
- Attitude to "self".

Successful self-identity is characterised by a sufficiently broad range of highly significant values, while lack of success is shown in their narrow range or absence. Subjectively, successful self-identity manifests itself as experiencing meaningfulness in one's own life, while the unsuccessful shows its meaninglessness. When characterising life values, it is important to take into account that the acquisition of social values and their understanding is an active process, determining to a considerable extent the individual's self-identity and his/her involvement in the life of society.

This research shows that each student forms his/her own individual system of values with a certain dominant moral component in their structure. The attitude to man as the highest value is a system-forming factor of the individual's spiritual structure. All relationships (both positive and negative) are determined by this key attitude to man (Rogers). This is why attitudes to others and to self were central in the experimental part of this research.

Analysis of the Experiment Results

The experiment was carried out in three different schools in Riga, Latvia. These schools differed in their organisation of educational process: an ordinary general secondary school (School No 29), a school specializing in English language (School No 34), and a secondary school providing specialised education (Pushkin Lyceum).

I was interested to identify the extent to which highly significant values are represented among senior secondary school students. For the analysis I used a method of 'external judges', represented by teachers working in these classes. We developed criteria of value-based attitudes, and explained their content to these teachers. The analysis of the results leads to the conclusion that a broad range of highly significant values can be observed among the students of School No 34 and Pushkin Lyceum. Students know these values and understand their content, but do not always demonstrate them in their behaviour. The students of School No 29 were characterised by a limited range of highly significant values, superficial understanding of their content, and lack of their active realisation.

It was also important to find out which values are personally meaningful for secondary school students, since life meaning for these students is formed on the basis of these values. I take life meaning to be an indicator of life values. As such, life meaning includes the following parameters:

- Awareness of the meaningfulness of one's own life;
- Planning how to achieve one's goals;
- Personally meaningful values;
- Orientation to self or other people.

Personally meaningful values are a system-forming structure of life meaning. Reflections on the meaning of life are an essential characteristic of self-identity.

Many researchers have often pointed out that interest in global issues about life meaning in general, and the meaning of their own existence in particular, are characteristics of late adolescence and early youth. Apart from their concern about these issues, they frequently discuss them with their peers and with adults whom they trust. Interest in life

meaning, and active discussions about this, indicate the active process of the development of self-identity, while their lack implies its distortion.

Senior form students were offered values of different kinds: spiritual, practical, focused on self, on other people, or on society.

The analysis of the results showed that interesting work, a well provided life, and career were the most significant values for senior secondary school students. Good and trusted friends, self-confidence, and love also are important in the structure of value-orientations. Freedom, health, happy family life, knowledge, active social position, and wisdom were less important. Social recognition, the happiness of others, entertainment, creativity, and the natural and artistic beauty were not considered as important life goals by the lyceum students.

Overall, material well-being was the leading position among all three groups of respondents. This reflects the spirit of our time, a pragmatic orientation of society. Unfortunately, neither self-confidence nor the happiness of other people was considered as a leading aspect by any of the groups of senior secondary school students.

Conclusion

This research confirms conclusions about the low level of moral orientation of senior secondary school students. It has to be admitted, though, that values like creativity, freedom, and active social life, occupy middle positions in the scale of values, i.e. they are important to a certain extent. It is necessary to actualize them by means of the humanisation of the educational process.

It can be concluded that the issue of life meaning is quite important for senior secondary school students. Subjectively experienced awareness of the meaningfulness of their own life is high. However, the moral component of values is not considered to be important. Material well-being is the dominant feature in the system of values. Certainly, it is an important value in modern society: however, the ways and methods of achieving this goal are, for senior secondary school students, not connected with their own activity (found a hidden treasure, received inheritance, have a high salary, etc.). Consequently, it is necessary to develop the moral component in the structure of values.

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