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THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE CULTUREIN MULTI-AGE EDUCATION

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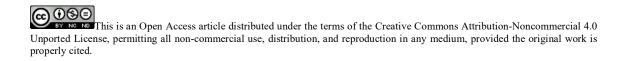(c) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University, Veliky Novgorod, Russia, gala@list.ru

Abstract

The article presents the preliminary results of a study of the influence of multi-age education conditions on the development of high school students' communicative culture. The understanding of culture as a form of being, during which a person appropriates and develops a certain system of meanings, values and norms, that is accepted in the study is justified. The concept of high school students' communicative culture is defined. To do this, the analysis of the psychological characteristics of the age period in question was carried out and its most important marker is identified, namely the formation of a sense of maturity, social maturity. It is proposed to use the possibilities of multi-age schooling to try to solve this problem. The concepts of multi-age education, its conditions and specifics are analyzed. In the article, multi-age education of high schoolchildren is understood as the co-education of people of various chronological ages, united by the objectives of a joint educational activity. These are the children who for some reason failed to study in ordinary schools, and adults who did not receive their general secondary education. The analysis of both the essays of the students representing different age groups as well as the teachers' long-term observation data has been conducted. The conclusion is made about the positive impact of the conditions of multi-age education on the development of high school students' communicative culture: the value of direct communication, the willingness to communicate and communication skill development increase resulting in enhancing the motivation to study.

1. Introduction

The change in the sociocultural environment caused by the development of information technology has affected the nature of communication in the society. The phenomenon of communicative culture, like any other sociocultural phenomenon, turned out to be subject to this influence (Simonova, Levchenkova, & Butyrina, 2019). Although the problem of high school children's communicative culture development has repeatedly attracted the attention of researchers, it does not seem to lose its significance at the moment. Dialogue and communication remain the most important resources of education.

A change in the sociocultural environment results in the subsequent change in children and the phenomenon of childhood itself. One of the significant changes was the alteration of intergenerational interaction. In the post-figurative culture, the older generation has ceased to be the main source of information and a translator of sociocultural codes, as it used to be. This is confirmed by the results of the study of modern youths conducted by Sberbank of the Russian Federation in late 2016 (30 facts…, 2017). Young people communicate with their parents on equal terms, without showing respect, feeling their own superiority in technical skills; they also find various aspects of the older generation's experience useless. In addition, the development of interaction in the information space has its own characteristics. The possibility of anonymous communication in this environment makes adjustments to real communication in the real world as well. The aggressiveness of communication is expanding. Communicative interaction is increasingly dominated with young people's stereotypes that are focused on insulting, indifference towards others rather than orientation on cooperation, discussion, sympathy and respect. Communication in the information society is becoming more and more formatted; its overall aggressive background is growing. The effect of 'social learning' is observed by means of integrating traditional and information space. Meanwhile, the communicative culture of the personality and its manifestation at the level of communicative skills contribute to the successful socialization, the correction of basic value orientations and create a harmonious interaction of the social activity development.

Second-generation federal state educational standards, among others, outline some aspects related to the development of schoolchildren's communicative culture. The most important behavioral elements of a person's communicative culture are presented in the form of a set of universal communicative educational actions: the ability to listen and participate in any dialogue and polylogue, interact productively with peers and adults, the ability to communicate, demonstrate a tolerant attitude towards others and a sense of responsibility for one's decisions and actions as well as some others. Similar ideas form the basis of the "Strategy for the development of education in the Russian Federation for the period until 2025", the concept of spiritual and moral development and education of the personality of a Russian citizen and other documents used as guidelines for education.

There are various ways of developing high school students' communicative culture. These can be psychological areas of work, for example, trainings, role-playing games, group discussion, etc. (Kalymbetovaa, Kulsariyevab, & Massalimovaa, 2015). One of the possible ways of developing schoolchildren's communicative culture may be studying in multi-age groups. The idea of teaching students of different ages lies at the basis of such well-known pedagogical systems as the Dalton plan, the Jena plan, the Vignette plan, Montessori pedagogy, Waldorf pedagogy, S. Frenet's pedagogy, the project method, "open schools" or "open learning". Numerous examples of modern practice in our country and abroad may

prove it. The general education systems include schools where classes are formed not by age, but by the degree of students' preparedness. These are special schools that unite those who, for whatever reason, were unable to timely receive general secondary education. They used to be called 'evening schools'. The concept of "high school children" is vague here - these are teenagers who must attend school by age, and adults. The specific environment of multi-age learning has been known for a long time, its positive impact on the education process has already been investigated. In this study, we focus on the relationship between the communicative culture development and the specifics of multi-age learning.

2. Problem Statement

The educational resource of multi-age education has several advantages compared to the traditional organization of the educational process in a modern school, which distributes students according to the principles of chronological age, subordination in the relationship between children and teachers and their hierarchy, asymmetry (Bălăiță, 2017). In multi-age classes, students have to interact with older and younger people, observe different behavioral and communication patterns. It turns out that such personality traits as politeness, ethics, tactfulness, readiness for mutual concessions, which do not have much significance among teenagers of the same age, are in demand when "everyone is equal". In a multi-age educational environment, the need for everyone to respect each subject's interests and values is more clearly manifested, since this environment itself is characterized by saturation (a new resource appears that is absent in traditional schooling - inter-age or inter-generational interaction) and emotionality (expanding the spectrum of interactions results in the extension of the communication emotional background).

This article presents the authors' conclusions about multi-age education potential for the development of high school students' communicative culture.

3. Research Questions

3.1. What is understood in the study by high school students' communicative culture? What aspect of modern high school students' communicative culture is our research focused on?

3.2. What features of multi-age education contribute to the development of high school students' communicative culture?

4. Purpose of the Study

Studying the specifics of multi-age education makes it possible to identify its pedagogical potential, including the one which appears in the context of the development of high school students' communicative culture.

The article presents an attempt to identify the positive aspects of the influence of multi-age education conditions at school No. 153 of the Frunze district of St. Petersburg on the development of high school students' communicative culture.

The results of the study can be further used to organize pedagogical work in secondary schools with multi-age classes as well as to plan multi-age interaction during extracurricular activities in ordinary comprehensive schools.

5. Research Methods

5.1. In order to study communicative culture and its characteristics, the available literature on the topic as well as the studies devoted to the identification of high school students' communicative culture specifics were analyzed.

5.2. In order to identify individual impressions and attitudes towards multi-age learning, a qualitative analysis of high school students' essays on the topic: "I am studying in a multi-age class" was conducted.

5.3. The included observation for high school students' communicative culture specifics held in the multi-age conditions was conducted throughout the period of 2017-2019 at school No. 153 of the Frunze district in St. Petersburg.

6. Findings

6.1. The concept of high school students' communicative culture in the problematic aspect of the given study

We share the views of those scientists who implement an integrative approach, considering the essence of culture through the concept of being (Kagan, 1991). This is a form of being, in the course of which a person first appropriates, then translates and develops a certain system of meanings, values and norms, ensuring him a harmony of interaction with nature and the society. Crucially essential in the case of a particular person is the intraculturological, personal aspect of the manifestation of culture, though, in the conditions of social groups.

The following ideas are most important for our self-determination in the concept of communicative culture. The idea of self-alteration in the process of communication (Lotman, 2000): "I-I" communication (self-communication), reflecting the process of transmitting information to oneself, occurs under the influence of the information received from somebody else ("I-He" communication),and the idea of dialogue relationships in the context of an individual – cultural objects and phenomena interaction (Bahtin, 1986).

In our study, we believe communicative culture to be an integral part of the general culture of an individual, which ensures harmonious interaction with the society on the basis of the implementation of the dialogue of "I-the Other" and "I-I" strategies.

The specificity of high school students' communicative culture is affected by the socio-psychological characteristics of this age. This period is characterized by the desire of young people to transform knowledge and experience into some personality scheme that helps them to set landmarks in life, in the world, in themselves, by a person's awareness of their subjectivity and individuality. The central neoplasm of high school students is the emergence and formation of the sense of maturity, social maturity in particular. This is a special form of self-consciousness through which he/she compares and identifies him/herself with kids of the same age, younger and older ones, finds patterns to follow, builds his/her relationships with the society, restructures his/her activities and becomes the subject of his/her lifepath.

Self-understanding of one's self, identification and juxtaposition of an "I" in communication with others contribute to the development of reflection, the realization of personal potential, its self-improvement and self-determination in the future (Fel'dshtejn, 2011; Tolstyh & Prihozhan, 2016).

Thus, communication (with others as well as oneself) is the most important mechanism in the self-determination of high school students, in the formation of their adulthood, their moral worldview, in their attempts to understand the environment and themselves. High schoolchildren's communicative culture is an integral part of the general personality culture of a high schoolchild, which ensures a harmonious interaction with the society in the process of growing up and self-determination in the future if based on the dialogue between the "I- the Other" and "I-I" strategies.

Among the various problematic aspects of communication between high schoolchildren, we pay attention to the simplification and modification of communication between teenagers and parents, and adults in general. There is a tendency towards a significant lengthening of the childhood period, up to 30 years or more, erasing the boundaries between generations (Arnett, 2011; Postman, 1994). This aspect is further complicated by the fact that modern high school students are immersed in social networks, virtual communication, which is fragmented and excludes any spiritual connection between people. They lack live, interpersonal and direct communication, including socializing with adults.

6.2. Multi-age education features and abilities in the development of high school students' communicative culture

Multi-age education has been popular and in demand for many centuries. It was used in different variations: in ordinary schools, including small ones, and in the specific conditions of 'closed' institutions, boarding schools and orphanages; for the systems of school and preschool education. In modern pedagogical literature, the concept of "multi-age education" is represented by various definitions. Foreign authors make use of such terms as "combined", "multilevel", "multi-age", "ungraded", "unclassified", "mixed-age education", "joint education of children of different ages"(Feldman & Gray, 1999; Hendrickson, Gable, & Manning, 1999; Hopping, 2000). Russian educators use the following names: "multi-age" or "inter-age", "multi-age multilevel" education (Bajborodova, 2007; Baterbiev, 2001). In this study, multi-age education is understood as a joint educational activity of students of different chronological ages, aimed at solving both collective and individual educational tasks, depending on the students' age.

In the context of our study, the conclusion drawn on the basis of prolonged observations is believed to be fundamental: the multi-age composition of classes "provokes" situations of student-student communication regardless of the chronological age. Moreover, this class composition can be renewed over the years of schooling many times, which complicates but enriches the communicative environment.

It is common knowledge that a high school student feels protected in a close-knit team. The recognition of a student's activity results by a group creates the situation of success, determines the strategy of self-affirmation. In a multi-age class, not only seniors are respected, but also those who are successful in learning regardless of their age. High-school students of different ages, united by common studying goals determine interpersonal relationships while interacting. These define the majority's involve mentin what is happening. High school students who find themselves in the situation of choosing multi-age interaction methods (in the process of a joint educational activity) design their relationships on the basis of cooperation, imitating each other, gaining individual communication experience. The development of

654

generally accepted norms and rules of behavior, the formation of a moral position occur as a result of one's own activity and experience, on the basis of self-awareness, but not as a result of adults' instructions. In the process of co-study, the views, opinions, and positions of people of different ages, different generations are rallied, which guarantees mutual understanding and harmonization of the relations between all the participants in the educational process - students, teachers, school administration and parents.

Below we submit the fragments of the essays written by the students from school No. 153 of the Frunze district of St. Petersburg, in which they expressed their opinions on multi-age education.

«Upon admission to school my wife and I (Eugeniy, 16, the 7th grade; Milena, 19, the 10th grade) experienced fear, because my classmates had always been people of the same age, but everything quickly returned to normal. We quickly got used to it, senior mates helped us (I -1 year; Milena - 4 years).We now see how different and useful communication during the lessons can be, the new roles which we play, and this is an invaluable experience».

 «I think multi-age education contributes to the emotional, intellectual and social development» (Natalya, 37, the 11th grade).

«In a multi-age class it is easier and more comfortable for me to study than in a regular one. A friendly working atmosphere reigns, excellent discipline always prevails, and there is no bullying, insult or humiliation. Our class is very friendly» (Oleg, 22, the 10th grade).

«I entered school in 2018 in the 9th grade, I didn't establish good relationships with classmates, I didn't make any new friends, I was insulted, forced to do what I didn't want, my academic performance lowered to D/F. The teachers and the school administration offered me a transfer to another class, where students of different ages studied. I happily agreed and never regretted it. I made both older and younger friends (either sex). We communicate with each other one qualterms. I appreciate the fact that there is always someone to turn to for advice; it's nice to be useful myself. We help each other not only in studies, but also in life» (Mustafa, 17, the 10th grade.)

The analysis of the essay texts and the results of teachers' lengthy observations at this school show that multi-age education can become the main "institution" of upbringing, development and personality formation in the general educational system. This is a special environment where high school students study, make friends, quarrel, communicate, interact and create families. High school students gain invaluable experience in communicative and social activities as well as in interacting with people of different ages in both formal and informal settings. All these result in the increased motivation for learning, discipline in the classroom and friendly atmosphere. The acquired communication experience will increase the chances of high school students to adapt to almost any conditions, and social roles, socialize, and then successfully find their place in their professional and personal life.

7. Conclusion

Communicative culture is one of the manifestations of general culture as a part of an individual's being at the personality level. It provides a harmonious interaction with the society through the implementation of the dialogue of strategies "I-the Other" and "I-I".

In the modern technological world, all spheres of life have undergone changes. They have affected communication and, as a result, communicative culture too. These changes relate to the diverse facets of

communicative culture. Firstly, intergenerational relationships are changing. It is difficult to say so far what prevails in this phenomenon - positive or negative points. However, the relationships that had used to be previously harmonious were disrupted and new relationship models are emerging. Secondly, communications in the information environment also change the very nature of communication, it is depersonalized and aggressiveness is growing due to anonymity. These two points are manifested in the communicative culture of high school students, creating certain problems in their socialization and the formation of their personalities.

We consider the possibility of studying in multi-age classes among the ways of solving such problems. Our study affects comprehensive schools with a diverse contingent of classes. As a rule, people who have gone through some difficult periods in their live sattend these schools. These include children of the corresponding age, having academic difficulties in ordinary schools, as well as adults that, for one reason or another, did not receive general secondary education when young. The multi-age co-education environment, we believe, can positively influence the development of high school students' communicative culture. This may prove to be effective not only for children of the appropriate age, but adults too.

The analysis of the essays written by student's from multi-age classes and lengthy observations conducted by school teachers revealed the beneficial effects of such education on people of different chronological ages. Young people gain a sense of security, motivation to study, the experience of communicating with adults and the opportunity to speak up without being ridiculed. They acquire self-confidence communicating with older students on equal footing. Students of older age feel their importance and success contrary to the previous background of the negative experience of the incomplete study. Communication with younger teenage students reveals their own communicative potential. A multi-age class becomes an island of harmonized intergenerational communication as communication of separate individuals.

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