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DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN THE TERRITORIAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS OF RUSSIA AND BELARUS

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Abstract

The article discusses the impact of a university project connected with diversity management issues on the professional identity of managers and teachers of educational organizations in Russia and the Republic of Belarus. The aim of the project is to develop the major ideas of the diversity management metatheory. The authors consider such ideas as the multidimensionality and inconsistency of the phenomenon of diversity; a broad psychological and pedagogical vision of inclusive education; institutional diversity of institutions; rejection of absolute tolerance denying the limits of toleration.

The approbation of the major ideas of diversity management metatheory was carried out in 7 regions of Russia and 2 regions of the Republic of Belarus. A total of 56 educational organizations participated in the experiment. The authors of the article cite the results of an online survey in which 3780 respondents took part, including 1350 primary school teachers, 1800 secondary school teachers, 630 managers of educational organizations. The survey contained questions that allowed analyzing the value judgments of managers and educators related to the impact of the university project on improving the professional activities of teachers in a heterogeneous educational environment, the attitude of teachers to the phenomenon of diversity, the process of forming tolerance among students and determining its boundaries, psychological and pedagogical vision of inclusive education, the nature of teachers' difficulties in their work with heterogeneous groups of students. The article offers some recommendations to the university and the territorial educational authorities aimed at providing methodological support to teachers.

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Keywords: Diversity management, educational systems, heterogeneous educational environment, territorial development.



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1. Introduction

The universities' project activities have various aims: conducting experiments to expand the scientific knowledge in various fields, supporting young scientists who improve their research skills under the guidance of experienced supervisors, creating design products that have no analogues in the world. At the same time, universities are developing and implementing a number of projects that, along with solving purely scientific problems, make a certain contribution to the socio-economic development of the regions of Russia and other countries. These projects may affect various areas of territorial development: economics, healthcare, social services, culture, and education. The evaluation of such projects is carried out not only by the achieved scientific results, but also by the influence that the leading ideas and results of a project have on the professional development of specialists involved in the field of activity which the university project is aimed at.

An example of such research is the project "The Formation and Development of the Pedagogical Metatheory of Diversity Management in Educational Systems" carried out by Russian and Belarusian universities with the support of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation. In the modern world there is a continuous expansion of cultural, ethnic, religious, intellectual, and social diversity. This process contains both a significant potential for the development of educational systems and the risks associated with poor governance due to the lack of readiness of the organizations' managers. Therefore, a need to develop a pedagogical metatheory of diversity management turned out to be urgent.

Major ideas of diversity management metatheory are as follows:

- the multidimensionality and inconsistency of the phenomenon of diversity, which, on the one hand, is a resource for the development of educational systems, and on the other hand, is associated with many risks in their functioning and development;
- a broad psychological and pedagogical vision of inclusive education presupposing involvement of various typological groups in the educational process, not just students with disabilities;
- institutional diversity of organizations providing education and upbringing for representatives of various heterogeneous groups, which means the coexistence of an inclusive school with the existing system of special defectological education;
- rejection of absolute tolerance which denies the limits of toleration; proclaiming reasonable tolerance which implies the existence of moral and ethical limits impeding the transformation of tolerant relations into social conformism, permissiveness, and indifference to values determining civic and national identity (Pevzner, Petryakov, Sheraizina, Donina, & Ushanova, 2017).

The research on the problem of diversity management in educational systems becomes relevant because of the following circumstances: the expansion of external and internal migration; the appearance of refugees and forced migrants in Russia, the Republic of Belarus, and in other countries due to political instability in a number of regions; problems of interethnic and interfaith relations in a multicultural society; the aggravation of the problems of integration into society of individuals and groups with special

needs (persons with disabilities, socially vulnerable groups, people with deviant behavior, intellectually and creatively gifted people, etc.).

Based on the study and analysis of the evaluative judgments of teachers and managers, the professional difficulties of teachers working with heterogeneous groups of students and their needs for scientific and methodological assistance from the university have been identified.

2. Problem Statement

The main research problem is to find an answer to the question regarding the extent to which the university project on managing diversity in educational systems can affect the attitude of managers and teachers of educational organizations to the phenomenon of diversity and their willingness to put into practice the major ideas of diversity management metatheory. The authors of the study believe that the diversity management in educational systems will be effective if the managers and teachers of educational institutions grasp and test in practice the major ideas of the diversity management metatheory that were defined during the implementation of the university's research project.

3. Research Questions

In the article, the authors search for the answers to the following research questions:

- 3.1. What is the impact of the university's research project on the attitude of managers and educators from various regions of Russia and the Republic of Belarus to the phenomenon of diversity and the ways of managing it?
- 3.2. How do the experiment participants understand the essence of inclusive education?
- 3.3. To what extent did respondents grasp the major ideas of diversity management metatheory?
- 3.4. What measures should the university and territorial educational authorities take to increase the readiness of managers and teachers to work with heterogeneous groups of students?

4. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to determine the impact of the university project on diversity management in educational systems on the professional identity of the managers and teachers of educational organizations and on their grasping of the major ideas of diversity management metatheory.

5. Research Methods

The research was based on a transdisciplinary methodological paradigm, which made it possible to establish logical connections not only between specific scientific disciplines (in this case, pedagogy and management), but also to explore the phenomenon of diversity in society, economics and science in general and in education in particular (Pevzner, Petryakov, & Sherayzina, 2017). The transdisciplinary

methodological strategy was specified using such scientific and methodological approaches as systematic, socio-psychological, comparative, axiological ones.

First of all, the modern view on education management is most consistent with a systematic approach. The essence of the systematic approach is largely revealed in the statement that "... the most in-depth study of the subject is possible only if it is a systematic one, i.e. either the object itself is considered as a system, or it is included as an element in a wider system" (Vvedensky, 2005, p. 37). In philosophical terms, the systematic approach is based on the idea of integrity, the complex organization and internal activity of the objects under study, that is, it forms a systematic view of the world. For its part, any system is characterized by a structure, connections between its elements, openness, functions performed and distinctive features. The essence of the systematic approach is to consider the diversity management in educational systems as a set of interrelated elements. This approach allows considering the diversity management metatheory as a system that accumulates and integrates at a generalized level the essential features of various theories of the development of pedagogical interaction in heterogeneous information and educational environments. The systematic approach allows for the integrity and systematic nature of the management process, for the most adequate design of the approaches to diversity management in the educational system and for the coverage of various management aspects.

When using a socio-psychological approach in scientific research, "the subject of analysis is such aspects and phenomena in organizations as a team composition, structure (in regards to groups), processes, group norms, culture, potential, etc." (Spivak, 2000, p. 144). The socio-psychological approach allows one to theoretically substantiate the process of forming a tolerant attitude of the subjects of the educational process to cultural differences as a potential and a resource for the development of an educational organization. In this case, we are talking about the formation of reasonable tolerance, acting in line with the metatheory of managing diversity, the antipode of absolute tolerance which denies the boundaries of toleration. At the personal level, the socio-psychological approach ensures the development of empathic and communicative skills of teachers and students, contributing to their productive interaction in a heterogeneous educational environment.

The comparative approach is now increasingly being used in interdisciplinary research. "In modern scientific discourse, comparative analysis plays the role of a kind of universal interdisciplinary method. It corresponds to the general humanitarian trend of recent times as a whole and is connected not only with the interaction of various disciplines among themselves, but also with an increased interest in the problems that arise at the intersection of sciences" (Zinovieva, 2014, p. 20). The comparative approach was used when conducting a comparative analysis of theories of diversity in different countries of the world, identifying the common, singular and special in these theories, as well as in the study of this problem in the regions of Russia and the Republic of Belarus, which will contribute to the construction of a metatheory based on a holistic view in terms of different educational paradigms and cultures.

The axiological approach allows studying the basic value guidelines of the diversity management metatheory, their refraction both in the system of collective values of educational organizations and in the personal values of teachers who directly interact with heterogeneous groups of students. A value, according to Tugarinov (1988), is not only objects, phenomena and their properties, but also ideas and motivations as the norm and ideal (Tugarinov, 1988, p. 261). Harmonization of collective and personal

values is a potent factor in individual and group motivation for effective professional activity in a heterogeneous educational environment.

The research partially used multicultural educational approaches in foreign pedagogy of higher education: the inclusive-active approach based on the principle of social constructivism that allows cultivating democratic values and involving students in active participation in society (USA); the inclusive-mosaic approach based on the principle of cultural relativism and preserving the uniqueness of each ethnic culture in national unity (Canada); the inclusive-value approach implementing the principles of value universalism and aiming at the adoption of national civic, moral, ethical and moral norms and values as the basis for building a national community (Australia) (Pluzhnik, Oskolova, & Herrington, 2017). However, given the differences in the multicultural situation prevailing in Russia and the above-mentioned countries, the full-scale use of these approaches was not possible.

When conducting the research, empirical methods were used: questionnaires, observation, conversation, interviews, the method of unfinished sentences, which made it possible to reveal the attitude of managers and teachers of educational organizations towards the factor of the diversity in 7 regions of Russia and 2 regions of the Republic of Belarus, as well as the degree to which they understood major ideas and value-semantic guidelines of the metatheory of diversity. The most generalized empirical method was an online survey of the managers and teachers of educational institutions, which, on the one hand, made it possible to identify their attitude to the factor of diversity in education, and on the other hand, the impact of a university project on the readiness of educational organizations to manage diversity in a heterogeneous environment.

6. Findings

In accordance with the problem posed, the authors of the article conducted a study that allowed identifying the degree of influence of the university project on the professional activities of the managers and teachers of educational organizations. For this purpose, the forms of approbating the major ideas of the diversity management metatheory, in which respondents participated under the guidance of university scientists, were studied. The most common forms of approbation were participation in thematic seminars (webinars) on the problems of metatheory of diversity (93%); the use in educational practice of the basic principles set forth in the collective monograph of scientists from partner universities (36%) (Pevzner & Petryakov, 2017); conducting small scale research on the positive and negative effects of the diversity factor on the learning process of schoolchildren (42%) etc.

In accordance with the research objectives, an assessment of diversity by various groups of school staff was revealed. If we generally characterize the array of respondents, then most of them (31%) joined the answer variant indicating “the ambiguity of the potential of diversity, which has both positive and negative sides”. Every fourth respondent (25%) supported the statement about diversity as a factor that forms a humane attitude to representatives of other social groups, and 23% of respondents point at its overall positive impact on educational organizations.

Along with the statements about the positive impact of diversity on the education system, a group of respondents emerged who view diversity as a clearly negative factor, reducing the quality of education.

This answer is gaining 5%, and other 7% of respondents believe that diversity objectively causes conflicts at school.

In the process of the study, the respondents' attitude to the process of forming tolerance in students and determining its boundaries was revealed. In modern research, tolerance is regarded as "the central component of multiculturalism and reflects the universal through the special differences of people" (Lee & Warner, 2004, p. 155). The issue of tolerance is becoming increasingly relevant in modern educational policy. Moods of mutual intolerance and cultural egoism penetrate the school more and more, which negatively affects the development of the personality of children. Therefore, the educational system should form in children a system of knowledge about peoples, cultures and national traditions; it should contribute to the destruction of cultural stereotypes and prejudices among schoolchildren.

It should be noted that the importance and necessity of building tolerance was indicated by 98% of respondents, i.e. the vast majority of respondents. At the same time, almost two thirds of the respondents (61%) say that tolerance should have certain boundaries. In this sense, the experiment participants supported the thesis of reasonable tolerance formulated in the pedagogical metatheory of diversity management.

No less important for the study was the question of a contemporary understanding of inclusive education essence. Most of the respondents' answers demonstrated traditional, narrow understanding of inclusive education as a co-education of healthy children and children with disabilities. Thus, the broad understanding of social inclusion, formulated in the metatheory of diversity management, has not been fully formed among the experimental work participants and requires further active discussion in wide pedagogical circles. This conclusion also correlates with the results of an empirical study of the implementation of inclusive education in the Republic of Belarus. In particular, in 2018, scientists from Vitebsk State University conducted a survey of parents in the Vitebsk and Mogilev regions on the implementation of inclusive education in a preschool educational organization. When respondents defined the concept of "inclusive education", the majority of survey participants considered inclusive education in the narrow sense of the word as co-education of healthy children and children with special needs in psychophysical development. Only 20% of respondents consider inclusive education in the broad sense of the word. At the same time, it should be noted that a broad understanding of inclusive education is becoming an important guideline for the development of the national education system of the Republic of Belarus. According to the findings of Belarusian researchers Lautkina and Shved (2019) and other project participants, the national education system, as well as international practice, provides for focused work with various categories of students in a common educational environment: with those who are gifted and talented, experiencing learning difficulties, having health problems, displaying deviant behavior, representing national minorities and migrant families, with refugees, forced migrants, with children in socially dangerous situations, with children with peculiarities of psychophysical development (Lautkina & Shved, 2019). Thus, a broad understanding of inclusive education is associated with the idea of expanding the educational environment in the Republic of Belarus, including all students in this environment, regardless of differences in their abilities and capabilities, of their cultural, social, national and religious status.

Next, the nature of the difficulties in the work of teachers with various typological groups of students with special educational needs was studied. Up to a third of the teachers surveyed (32%) admit that they experience the greatest difficulties with students who have behavior problems. One in five (22%) finds it difficult to work with children due to problems with the language of instruction.

Since the survey revealed problems of work with students from heterogeneous families, it was logical to ask the question about the need for methodological support in work with these groups of students. The results of an empirical study show that 91% of teachers speak about the need for such support, and only 9% do not need it. The results obtained indicate the need for advanced training of teachers on the interaction with heterogeneous groups.

7. Conclusion

7.1. As the study showed, the participation of educational organizations in approving the major ideas of the diversity management metatheory formed among their managers an understanding of the significance of the potential of diversity as a resource for the development of the organization, as well as the risks associated with its use in educational practice. It significantly increased the willingness of schools to work with children with special educational needs. This result indicates a significant impact of the university project on the professional identity of teachers and managers of educational organizations.

7.2. The experimental work participants demonstrated a high level of understanding the major ideas and value-semantic guidelines of the metatheory of diversity management. The least successful in the approbation process was the formation of a broad psychological and pedagogical vision of inclusive education. Unfortunately, a significant number of experiment participants were not able to go beyond applying inclusive education only for groups of students belonging to the category of “children with disabilities” or “persons with disabilities”. The reason for such a traditional, narrow vision of inclusive education is its interpretation in most regulatory documents adopted in Russia and the Republic of Belarus.

7.3. The study revealed that a number of teachers who participated in the experiment still experience professional difficulties in working with some typological groups of students and need special scientific and methodological support. In this regard, it is recommended that the university and the territorial educational authorities consider a series of training seminars for various categories of teachers on the issue of managing diversity in heterogeneous educational environments.

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