

PHILOSOPHY OF CONTEMPORARY POLY CULTURAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The goal of the article is to consider one of the urgent issues of modern school, i. e. education in the context of multiculturalism. In the article there are compared the concepts of "multicultural education" in the USA and "polycultural education" in Russian Federation. Meanwhile it is noted that conceptual structure of modern polycultural education is going through a syncretic phase, which means that inventory and concretization of concepts appearing in the papers on this topic are indispensable.

Key words: multicultural education, polycultural education, multiculturalism, personal self-determination in culture.

Global integration has become one of the main reasons for being aware of multiculturalism as the significant feature of contemporary social reality. The processes of globalization lead to renewal and revival of different cultures and languages of culture by multiplying the number of integral connections favoring mutual understanding between the members of the cultural dialogue. Education becomes one of the major integrating factors and conditions for the personal development, while integration processes in education systems act as the means to master the world culture, to transmit social and individual experience, to provide for designing common world-view based on the principles of humanism, to organize humanity into one interrelated system.

Having regard to the new sociocultural situation, the world philosophical and pedagogical thought is developing respective ways to improve the system of education. One of the leading methods for designing and developing education in the context of multiculturalism and multilingualism is a culturalological approach, which directs the system of education towards dialogue of cultures and contributes to the personal self-determination in culture. The purpose of this article is to examine contemporary polycultural education in the Russian Federation and compare it with Western multicultural education.

Originally, the ideas of multicultural education grew out of social movements in the United States such as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the Women's Rights Movement, and People with Disabilities Rights Movement (2).

Multicultural education challenges educators to develop their competencies of multiculturalism. Dhillon (2005) explains that "multiculturalism signifies the diversity of forms of life" (8). It recognizes the value of different ways of life in social and cultural networks.

Western scientists tend to view it as:

- a) *a philosophy* of cultural pluralism within the educational system that is grounded in principles of equality, mutual respect, acceptance and understanding, and moral commitment to social justice (5);
- b) *a reform movement* that changes all components of the educational enterprise, including its underlying values, procedural rules, curricula, instructional materials, organizational structure, and governance policies to reflect cultural pluralism (6; 11);
- c) *a kind of education* "free of inherited biases, with freedom to explore other perspectives and cultures, inspired by the goal of making children sensitive to the plurality of the ways of life, different modes of analyzing experiences and ideas, and ways of looking at history found throughout the world" (13);
- d) *a "humanistic concept"* based on the strength of diversity, human rights, social justice, and alternative lifestyles for all people, it is necessary for a quality education and includes all efforts to make the full range of cultures available to students; it views a culturally pluralistic society as a positive force and welcomes differences as vehicles for better understanding the global society" (10)

Scientists believe that multicultural education is a philosophy, a methodology for educational reform, and a set of specific content areas within instructional programs, which require changes in school curriculum, policies, and practices. Multicultural education can ease tensions peculiar to multicultural society by teaching skills in cross-cultural communication, interpersonal relations, perspective taking, contextual analysis, understanding alternative points of view and frames of reference, and analyzing how cultural conditions affect values, attitudes, beliefs, preferences, expectations, and behaviors. It also can help students learn how to understand cultural differences without making hasty and arbitrary value judgments about their intrinsic worth. Attaining these goals can be expedited by providing wide varieties of opportunities for students to practice their cultural competence and to interact with people belonging to different cultures and sharing different experiences.

Sonia Nieto has introduced an "additive" and critical model of multicultural education which is reflected in a "variety of levels of attitudes and behaviors" (11). Its levels range from mere tolerance, to acceptance, to respect, and at the epitome, to affirmation, solidarity, and critique. At its most sophisticated level, multicultural education not only deromanticizes culture in general but also accommodates and even welcomes the conflict of values and behaviors inherent in culture contact.

Multicultural curricula should not just focus on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements (4; 12; 15), instead it should enable students to understand “concepts, issues, themes, and problems” (4) from different perspectives and viewpoints. Gollnick and Chinn (2006) recommend that students be encouraged to question and comprehend what they are learning from their teachers, textbooks, or other resources. They also should question and challenge the inequitable structures that socially suppress cultural diversity and multiple perspectives (8).

Cultivating patriotism is viewed as an essential part of multicultural education, but exclusive emphasis on cultural pride may lead students to think of themselves in one-dimensional terms and will inhibit the tendency to explore other dimensions, including other *cultural* dimensions of the self. Overemphasizing points of difference with other groups and under-emphasizing points of similarity also leads to the increase of tensions. Patriotism and cosmopolitanism, at their best, should complement each other. We view the main idea of multicultural education to help students understand the fact that cultural respect is another form of respect for the individual, then we should not be obliged to teach about any particular cultures; rather, we should simply be obliged to teach about the need to respect individual choice.

According to Bennett, six goals of multicultural education are: 1) to develop multiple historical perspectives; 2) to strengthen cultural consciousness; 3) to strengthen intercultural competence; 4) to combat racism, sexism, and all forms of prejudice and discrimination; 5) to increase awareness of the state of the planet and global dynamics; and 6) to develop social action skills (6).

Thus we can see that multicultural education is a complex phenomenon that requires educators to apprehend the ontological and epistemological complexities of diverse and pluralistic contexts. It is important to emphasize that cultural identity includes not only race and ethnicity, but also gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, exceptionality, language, religion, geography, and age. For example, Banks (2007) states that “the group is the social system that carries a culture” (1). He identifies a group’s culture as microculture, in opposition to macroculture, which is the overarching or national culture. Gollnick and Chinn (2006) identify characteristics of culture, which means that culture can be learned, shared, modified, and changed. An individual may belong to several groups at the same time, but probably the individual has strong characteristics in a certain group, while others are weak. One of the major goals of multicultural education is to develop an understanding of oneself and of others. It aims to help individuals develop an understanding of how they may shape and reshape their identity by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures (3). Banks (1999) argues that “individuals who know the world only from their own cultural and ethnic perspectives are denied important parts of the human experience and are culturally and ethnically encapsulated” (3). However, most multicultural curriculum theories in USA, as well as in Russia, focus on racial, national and ethnic differences.

In twenty-first-century Russia, the ideas of multiculturalism and multicultural education are gaining momentum very rapidly. The Russian Federation has been ethnically and culturally pluralistic but structurally and educationally monolithic since ancient times. Until the mid-1980s, bilingual or multilingual education was a more common approach than multicultural education. The Russian educational tradition placed a primary emphasis on knowing another language in order to understand another culture. The term “culture” had been relegated to the activities of the ministry of culture, such as the organizing of cultural events, holidays, and celebrations. The idea of multiculturalism and multicultural education, incorporating a whole range of issues, and not only racial, national and ethnic diversities, is relatively new in Russia (14).

The conceptual structure of modern polycultural education is going through a syncretic phase, which means that inventory and concretization of concepts appearing in the papers on this topic are indispensable. Though Russian scientists contribute to the large set of investigations of this urgent problem, paying attention to goals and aims of polycultural education (Belogurov A. Y., 2005; Kolobova L. V., 2006; Pafova M. F., 2006; Peskov I. V., 2009; Sokolova A. A., 2009; Suprunova L. L., 2002); realization of the ideas of polycultural education in practice (Ardashev A. N., 2006; Ershov V. A., 2003; Ziatdinova F. A., 2006; Menskaya T. B., 1993; Pavlova I. V., 2003; Tkachuk A. A., 2003; Shafrikova A. V., 1998); the potential of polycultural education in students’ upbringing (Baichekueva N. H., 2005; Volova L. A., 2008; Zhukova O. G., 2008; Kovaleva Yu. S., 2009; Kozhurova A. A., 2008; Malinovskaya S. M., 2009; Matis K. V., 2007; Rykova S. V., 2005, etc.), the role of foreign languages in polycultural education (Aleksashenkova I. V., 2000; Bogovik N. V., 2009; Bulankina N. E., 2002; Vygodchikova N. N., 2008; Elizarova G. V., 2005; Leontovich O. A., 2002; Safonova V. V., 1992; Sysoev P. V., 2004; Solovova E. N., 2002; Ferapontov G. A., 2000; Halyapina L. P., 2006; etc.); the theories of personal self-determination in culture (Aleksandrova E. A., 2002; Bulankina N. E., 2002; Krylova N. B., 2007; Lisina L. M., 2008; Platonova L. M., 2004; Sysoev P. V., 2004); formation of polycultural education (Vasyutenkova I. V., 2006; Guryanova T. Yu., 2008; Danilova L. Yu., 2007; Kovaleva T. I., 2008; Lunyushkina I. S., 2009; Filatova N. P., 2009; Shheglova E. M., 2005); teacher’s training in the context of multiculturalism (Baichekueva N. H., 2005; Vasyutenkova I. V., 2006; Kovaleva T. I., 2008; Miroshnichenko V. V., 2003; Simukhina V. P., 2003; Tishulina S. G., 2006; Tkach L. T., 2002; Shajgozova Zh. N., 2006; Yakadina T. A., 2004).

There is another term describing the phenomenon of multicultural education in Russian language – ‘polycultural education’ (from Greek ‘poly-’, i. e. ‘many’), which meaning is close to the contemporary Western concept of multicultural education taking into account gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, exceptionality, language, religion, geography, and age as well as race, nation and ethnicity. On the other hand, the meaning of the Russian term ‘multicultural education’ (as it was in the beginning of its conceptualization in the USA) corresponds to its prevalent interpretation as an education in the context of ethnic diversity with the domination of culture of the titular ethnic group – Russian. In this context, the concept of ‘polycultural education’ appears to be more suitable for the contemporary sociocultural situation in the Russian Federation.

In our view, the four main goals of polycultural education are:

- 1) To create conditions for effective personal self-determination in culture, becoming apparent in actualization of students’ national self-consciousness, social identity and choice of occupation. The key prerequisite for this process are language and speech activity (language consciousness and language self-

expression of a person) in the situations of polyphonic interaction with the representatives of different cultural communities (7).

2) To enrich students' individual thesauruses with concepts that describe contemporary sociocultural situation, and familiarize students with speech strategies to discuss cultural phenomena (7).

3) To cultivate a positive attitude and respect towards all "alien" values of other cultures.

4) To form the skills of intercultural communication, show students the ways to behave in polycultural society, and to provide an opportunity to gain experience of intercultural interaction. It must be remembered that only in the process of intercultural interaction students can fully comprehend the fact, that language, consciousness, and culture are interconnected, thus ignorance of cultural context can lead to intercultural misunderstandings, conflicts and tensions.

Thus, multicultural education, initiated by the civil rights movement in the United States, has spread beyond the country's borders and is taking hold in Russia, where this phenomenon is investigated from different points of view. Nevertheless, growing and changing diversity in the Russian Federation poses new challenges and opportunities for polycultural teachers, educators, education policy makers, parents and scientists to develop new theories and realize them in practice.

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