DEVELOPING PUPILS’ CULTURAL COMPETENCES DURING INTEGRATED STUDIES IN MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT OF PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract: In recent years the number of ethnically heterogeneous classrooms in educational system of Latvian schools is increasing. Classroom environment is becoming multicultural. The problem requires to look for a study model which could facilitate the development of cultural competences in the study process for the pupils of early school age by investigating pupils’ attitude to cultural elements of both their own and other nations. The results of research work proves that integrated studies based on action theory can successfully promote the developmental process of pupils’ cultural competences. Curriculum integration enables primary teachers to provide a relevant context for learning, based on pupils’ needs, it enhances pupils’ motivation and participation by getting acquainted with values and traditions of diverse cultures. Theoretical discussion is based on Banks, J.A, Bruner, J. Dirba, M., Mall, R. statements emphasizing that mutual perception, evaluation and influence can occur only when a pupil accepts the tasks and means proposed by the educator and envisaged to facilitate the action. It is the most essential that a child understands that another world outlook and understanding are possible and can be used for his own development. A cultural competence can be defined as pupils’ ability to be aware of their own and other cultural values related to interaction with others. In his turn M.Dirba formulated the development of cultural competences as a communicative cross-cultural competence comprising both knowledge on diverse social groups and processes, and skills to evaluate them critically and apply them in a certain situation and develop empathy and respect to the diverse.

Keywords: environment, competence, values, curriculum integration.

Introduction
Introduction of humane paradigm into educational strategy, which involves understanding of different cultures and the possibility to accept the diverse, causes various problems which require a solution. Recently there is a growing trend in Latvia to send minority children to Latvian schools, thus, the multicultural environment exists also in Latvian schools.

The mentioned trend in society necessitates teachers to improve their professional competence, choose educational means for purposeful pedagogical cooperation which could promote early school age pupils’ interest, emotional attitude to cultural values of their own and other nations. It means to develop and implement such study model which could facilitate the development of cultural competence in pupils. It is a new approach to both pupils and teachers and requires the revision of the existing study content and methods. In collaboration with pupils, it is necessary to create such a study model which would allow an active pupils’ involvement in its planning, taking into account specific interests and needs of all children. The mentioned approach can be successfully implemented during the integrated study model where pupils learn to plan and accept diversities. In this case the skills and attitude to be acquired by pupils can be called cross-cultural competence. M.Dirba formulated the development of cultural competences as a communicative cross-cultural competence comprising both knowledge on diverse social groups and processes, and skills to evaluate them critically and apply them in a certain situation and develop empathy and respect to the diverse. (Dirba, 2006). It is a specific ability to accept patterns of a diverse culture (Edwards, 2009).

Methodology
The current research work is based on the results of previous research on teachers’ readiness, desires, and problems during their work in ethnically heterogeneous classrooms. The methodological base of the research is made up by the research of action. The research paradigm is based on the research of
action which comprises a theoretical and active cycle characterized by qualitative research. The proposed methodology includes the implementation of integrated study model from the perspective of action theory. 144 pupils of early school age from 12 Latvian schools and 20 RTTEMA 4th year students took part in the research. The objective of the research was to investigate pedagogical possibilities of developing cultural competences in the pupils of early school age. The following theoretical and empirical methods were used in the research: analysis of literature, a partly structured interview in order to learn about pupils’ attitude to Latvia as a value and to minority pupils who have arrived in Latvia, modelling pedagogical situations in the integrated study model.

The research comprised 3 interconnected stages.

Culture can’t be learned, one must grow into it. Culture already exists in recognition of values, but values cannot be perceived with mind – they must be experienced emotionally (Jurevics, 1936).

Since school is an active developer of cultural changes it must be more open to cultural processes (Edwards, 2009).

In accordance with the theoretical statements, the pupil’s activity comprises a positive emotional experience, thus, it becomes personally significant to him.

Action theory is based on statements which emphasise the material and mental unity of cognition looked upon from subjective and objective aspects because the action process takes place upon interaction of the subject and object by means of direct and reflexive coherence. Action is such a form with the help of which awareness and the world which it reveals, correlate in real processes resulting in transition from objective reality in the fact of awareness, and the opposite – the transition of awareness fact or idea back into reality (Леонтьев, 1994).

When creating an integrated study model, it is possible to incorporate various aspects of study content in a meaningful whole. Teaching and learning become as one entity. When getting acquainted with cultural values and traditions of other nations, pupils themselves can actively get involved in the study process by discovering, investigating, comparing, creating all conditions for pupils’ emotional experience and the process of developing cultural competence.

If we want our young people to be tolerant to the diverse, they must have experience with the otherness. It is stressed by American classic J.Banks (Banks, 2004) and also in integrative civil education standards Democracy and Diversity worked out by a group of international specialists in education. Diversity in democratic society today is topical because certain ethnic, religious, language, sexual orientation and disability groups are structurally or culturally privileged or restricted.

R.Mall depicts the social tendencies of the 21st century focusing on openness for mutual understanding: desire to understand and be understood stressing cross-cultural approach as attitude, philosophical conviction that there does not exist one culture for all mankind, as respect, tolerance towards the values of different cultures (Mall, 1997)

The article also uses the notion “cross-cultural competence,” thus, revealing the diversity of cultural competence.

Results and discussion

This process is characterized by plural thinking involving communication between cultures. A question arises: Don’t we try to teach culture too much at school? If we speak about acquisition of traditional culture, then we can state that children often learn common Latvian folk songs as an ordinary short poem without thinking and understanding the wisdom of them.

During the 1st stage of the research RTTMA students carried out a survey of pupils from Form 3 about children’s comprehension of folk songs and what they can tell about a famous Latvian folk song collector K. Barons. The results were not good. From 73 children from different schools only 9 children’s’ answers revealed that they understand the essence of Latvian folk songs.

The most typical answers can be arranged in 3 groups. (Table 1)
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group division</th>
<th>Characteristics of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1- 9 children</td>
<td>Latvian folk songs have been collected by Latvian people themselves. They teach us how to do everything better. All people sent folk songs to Kr. Barons who saved them and placed them in a big bookcase with a lot of drawers. There are very many small leaflets with folk songs. It is also written where the folk song comes from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2- 23 children</td>
<td>Latvian folk songs are about all holidays. We recite them at Christmas, Easter. There are a lot of folk songs about mummy. Folk songs can be found in various books. They are about everything. Kr.Barons liked folk songs a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3- 41 children</td>
<td>Folk songs are poems. We learn them by heart, and then we have to recite them expressively. We recite them in different holidays. We do not remember about Kr.Barons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The discussions with the pupils of Form 3 confirm the words said by P.Jurevics already in the 30ties that culture cannot be learned, one must grow into it (Jurevics, 1936). It means that one must analyze his/her proficiency as a teacher and look for additional educational means which would help a pupil to accept and understand various cultural values. A question arises: If a pupil has to compare and select Latvian traditional cultural heritage according to specially created conditions, how the mentioned process affects the pupil’s own attitude, understanding?

According to theoretical conclusions, the mentioned pupil’s activity comprises a positive emotional experience, thus, the activity performed by the pupil becomes personally significant to him.

Any action comprising a necessity to assess, compare, analyze includes statements of discovery studies, which is the theoretical base of integrated study model. For instance, pupils, when getting ready for hosting guests from England, evaluate which folk songs could be more appropriate to describe Latvia better, which games to play together with the children from England. The pupils then have to look for, analyze how easy or complicated the words and rules are. Assuming that the pupils from England do not understand Latvian, it will be easier to acquire such game where the text is easier to perceive. In such circumstances Latvian children have to evaluate, analyze, think and make conclusions. The mentioned action can be characterized as a discovery study model.

Discovery action in the study process can be defined as empirical approach to the acquisition of knowledge. It is a scientific research method where practical activities develop from the analysis of an individual, theoretically designed situation, and it facilitates learning experience (Bruner, 1997).

The analyzed conclusion does not give the answer to the problem put forward at the beginning of the article that in many primary school classes minority pupils learn concurrently with Latvian children. The classroom environment changes, the teacher faces a problem how to work better. Either to stick to the statement that, if a pupil goes to Latvian school, then all study content, all out-of-class activities are focused on the things envisaged for the Latvian children or accept scientific experience that by getting acquainted with the diverse, it is possible to understand the values of own culture and evaluate it better. At present we must admit that the classroom environment of many schools is becoming multicultural.

Environment – physical and mental, social environment, the entirety of mutual attitudes and interaction which surround objects of animate and inanimate nature, ensure the presence and link (communication) between the objects (individuals), affect their existence.

The dominant of multicultural education is directed towards the promotion of awareness of the values of several cultures, broadening their horizons and develop the comprehension in pupils about the common and diverse in outlooks, values and beliefs of various cultures. Indisputably, a great emphasis is put on the skill of verbal and nonverbal communication.
In order to ensure the above mentioned approach, it is necessary to analyze the process more profoundly emphasizing how pupils develop comprehension of values.

According to David Moshman a child develops in a cultural environment. This development takes place in the process of obtaining experience. In interaction with environment, under appropriate pedagogical guidance, a child obtains personal experience (Moshman, 2005).

Awareness of mental values, various social skills in multicultural environment is connected with non-differential world perception of junior pupils and certain egocentric manifestations.

Reposing on uniformity of upbringing and teaching process one can refer to certain interrelations in multicultural environment, as a result of which in the pupil’s system of values in the new quality is reflected the ability to accept the peculiarities both in his own and other cultures.

A teacher’s proficiency and readiness to change the study and upbringing content according to the peculiarities of multicultural environment in his class determine the fact that this environment becomes a facilitator of pupils’ values or, on the contrary, it creates serious problems in acquisitions of regular study content.

Theoretical conclusions reveal that the development of values of their own and other cultures is based on pupils’ positive emotional experience and positive attitude which determines the pupils’ active involvement in the study process.

The next step of the research work comprised the assessment and selection of study content for the design of an integrated study model which provided the opportunity for the pupils to express their positive attitude, actively get involved in the planning of classes and discovery action through the content of various subjects (social sciences, the Latvian language, art and mathematics).

The beneficiaries will be both the native and minority children who learn together at school.

During the 2nd stage of the research, in order to learn about the attitude to Latvia and minorities, the 4th year students carried out a structured interview within the framework of social sciences, finding out pupils’ attitude to other nations from the perspective of values. 53 children from different schools took part in this interview. The results are revealed in Figures 1.,2.,3.

**Figure 1. Pupils' attitude towards Latvia.**

- **About Freedom monument, parks, Riga, houses, organs, Old Riga, museums.**
  - How good it is in Riga, the country is very beautiful, there are 4 regions in Latvia, every region is different. I like here different. 46 pupils express a positive attitude and name concrete things.
  - A boring country. Do not know what to tell. Will not tell anything, let them come and see themselves. 7 pupils give their opinion which is indifferent.

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The essence of the second question was based on pupils’ emotional experience in connection with Latvian traditions and festivals.

![Figure 2. Pupils’ attitude, emotional experience.](image)

The third question intensified the clarification of pupils’ attitude.

![Figure 3. Pupils’ attitude to the quests from neighbouring countries.](image)

As we see from the results in all three figures, pupils attitude to national cultural elements, traditions, foreigners is positive. Analyzing the pupils’ answers we can conclude that the theoretical statements which comprise correlation of emotional experience and practical activity prove true. For instance, selecting Janis day as a significant Latvian tradition, the explanation is linked with making a bonfire and eating cheese. Also Lacplesis day is linked with a torchlight procession.

The last stage of the research comprised the implementation of an integrated study model in pedagogical work with Form 3 pupils for the development of pupils’ cultural competence. The aim of
integrated studies focuses on promotion of pupils’ experience in accordance with their developmental potencies, interests, creating a favourable environment for pupils’ development, taking into account pupils’ interests and avoiding their overload, thus, facilitating pupils’ cognitive activities based on their active involvement and action

Arranging the elements of subject content into thematic units, interest groups it is more possible to take into consideration pupils’ interests, peculiarities of multicultural environment. According to the research by B. Beyer, R. Fogarty, (Beyer, 1987, Fogarty, 1995) we can conclude that the arrangement of content into thematic units which also comprises the integration of pupils’ skills, focuses more on the process of learning than the products of learning provides a child –centred curriculum- one tailored to their interests, needs and abilities, stimulates self-directed discovery and investigation inside and outside of the classroom.

Even if there are only Latvian children in the classroom, themes, problems which can be acquired based on integrated study content, help pupils better understand the elements of their own culture and get to know and accept the diverse.

The effectiveness of the created study models for Form 3 pupils were monitored by the 4th year students of RTTEMA during their qualification practice. The designed content and methods of integrated classes were piloted in 12 Latvian schools.

The integrated study content comprised pupils’ active involvement. In order to see the benefits of integrated learning, one integrated study class is analysed in the article (length of classes - 80 minutes). Of course, during the lesson children will relax. Theme of the lesson is hosting guests from Estonia. In order to draft a plan of events and plan activities, the necessary expenses, pupils acquire both content of social sciences - the skill to take an economically grounded decision- and content of mathematics –the skill to calculate all the expenses for food and cultural activities, if we know that 5 pupils from Estonia are coming and are going to spend 4 days in Latvia. The pupils have to apply multiplying with a 2 digit number and mathematical notions –’’more and less’’

In its turn, when putting forward a problem – what pupils could make to leave the memories from Latvia to the guests – in a common discussion which comprises the content of social sciences, they come to conclusion that it could be a greeting card comprising both Latvian and Estonian ethnographic patterns. As the learning process for pupils is organized according to the above mentioned statements of action theory, then the pupils themselves search, analyse both Latvian and Estonian ethnographic patterns and justify which of them could be appropriate for formatting the postcard. During the analysis pupils implicitly learn about the elements of both their own national art and that of the other country. In its turn, the design of the postcard, analysis and justification comprise the content of visual art. The greeting card will not have any value if there is no text in the middle. It is up to the pupils to opt which folk songs to choose, how to format them, where to find the folk songs. A searching process takes place, pupils learn to find and justify, on the other hand, they implement the content of the Latvian language. All mentioned pupils’ activities include active work of the pupils themselves: the necessity to judge, analyse, evaluate, draw conclusions which, on the whole, make the elements of both their own culture and also the cultures of those countries from which the guests are coming from

Students’ carried out the analysis on the effectiveness of the conducted classes. There was a conclusion that basically all the pupils were delighted and with pleasure took part in both planning and implementing of activities.

From 107 pupils of Form 3 who, under the guidance of students, participated in the mentioned class in different Latvian schools, 91 pupils showed a special interest and delight, whereas only 16 were not interested. To sum up all the mentioned, we can conclude that pupils are open and interested in practical work related to learning about both their own culture and cultures of other nations.

Conclusions
In accordance with the analysis of theoretical conclusions and the research carried out in Latvian schools, we can state that the development of cultural competence in multicultural classroom environment comprises several interconnected stages:
• Creating emotional experience which provides students’ positive attitude to values of both own and other cultures.
• Active involvement of pupils’ themselves in planning of study process, selection of content, thus, providing the pupils with discovery action in the acquisition of study content.
• Discovery action can be successfully implemented in the teacher’s created integrated study model which comprises incorporation of several study subjects in a meaningful whole providing the pupils with the opportunity to get to know more deeply and emotionally experience cultural values of their own and other nations.

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Summary. Establishing primary school pupils' subjectivity in education context. Phenomena of social situation development and establishment of personal stance during primary school age in their interrelation are being discussed in the article. Stages of subjectivity establishment among primary school pupils are being described, and subjectivity is being considered in the context of independent educational activity and development.

It is being shown that motivation towards studying among primary school pupils dynamically varies from year to year and depends on two factors: level of educational tasks difficulty and teacher's part in relationship warming with pupils.