

THE POTENTIALITY OF CREATING IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FUNCTION OF EMANCIPATION IN A BORDER LAND SCHOOL. THE EXAMPLE OF A POLISH SCHOOL IN LATVIA

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***Abstract.** Political and social changes happening in Europe at the end of the previous century inspired many researchers involved in explaining the processes of integration, assimilation or adaptation of indigenous communities and moving to the Old Continent from different parts of the world. There also appeared certain activities that support marginalized minorities. One of the many initiatives to meet the Poles living in a foreign country was one planned and conducted in Riga since 1989 by scientific communities of the UMK and UŁ, a Polish-Latvian educational experiment, aiming to organize a bilingual, bicultural and inclusive Polish school in Riga. Contemporarily, schools may perform three types of functions: to reconstruct, to adapt and to emancipate. Emancipation is an experience of freedom, which is achieved by the integration of knowledge, the possession of power and the ability to work for the best interest of an entity. The following text deals with the educational institution organized in the form of a border lands school and its role in freedom experienced by students, achieved by integrating knowledge about mechanisms that strengthen the sense of connectedness with the culture, tradition and language, as well as a minority group power's over their own choices based on the autonomous thinking of giving power to act in a complex and ambiguous world. Running for 25 years, this longitudinal study allows us to illustrate the phenomenon of building an educational alternative in the situation of observed changes in the political and social sphere happening in the 90s in one of the countries of Eastern Europe, which has been in the Soviet sphere of influence for years. Thus, it becomes possible to demonstrate the dynamics of the phenomenon, the process of identity on the border between cultures together with an indication of the emancipatory function of a Polish school in Latvia.*

***Keywords:** national identity, behaviour identity, Polish education in Latvia, longitudinal studies, emancipation.*

Introduction

Contemporarily, schools may perform three types of functions: to reconstruct, which is to recreate the social structure, as well as the universal and national culture, passing it to pupils, to adapt, which is to introduce the young to the already existing social and professional roles and present the world in a way so that the pupils saw the existing system as necessary and unchangeable. The third function is to emancipate, which is to: prepare people to constantly work on themselves, which leads to crossing the imposed limitations and participating in changing both the closer and wider environment for the better and more thoroughly organized. (Kwieciński, 1995:21)

The main issue to consider in deliberations about emancipation is the term of freedom. On the basis of the theory of emancipation, freedom is simultaneously the aim and the prerequisite of the activity of the entity aimed at achieving adulthood in the intellectual, emotional and moral sense. Exploring the conditions for exercising freedom is a task to perform for education. After entering into the possession of knowledge, you can design changes and evaluate their effectiveness. It also involves the discovery of power, that is the power to influence the thinking and action of others in order to induce intentional changes while achieving their own interests. Therefore, knowledge is the basis for the formulation of strategies to change what the limiting force is or preserve that which bears the marks of strength to support individual development and change. According to Paulo Freire (Kostylo, 2003:404) freedom is not a human deposit, but rather it is the action and reflection of people over the world in order to transform it.

Education is an area of the relationship between knowledge, power and freedom (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2006:25), which can deploy critical autonomous thinking, but may also condition the power to preach to wait for commands and directives. These two power relations, knowledge and freedom, appoint subjective emancipatory potential. Because emancipation is an experience of freedom, achieved through the integration of knowledge, the possession of power and the dispositions to act are aimed at the real interest of an entity.

This text deals with the educational institution organized on the border between cultures and its role in the experience of the students' freedom achieved through the integration of knowledge on mechanisms that strengthen the feeling of kinship with the culture, tradition and language, as well as the minority group's power over their own choices based on the autonomous thinking of giving power to act in a complex and ambiguous world. This text speaks of the role of the public school auditorium, strengthening the personal emancipatory potential of this institution, and increasing the students choice of self-identification. Conducting longitudinal research in Polish schools in Latvia allows us to illustrate the phenomenon of building alternative educational situation while observing the changes in the political and social sphere since the 90s in one of the countries of Eastern Europe, which has been in the Soviet sphere of influence for years (Urlińska, 1994; 1995a). It enables us demonstrate the dynamics of the phenomenon, the process of shaping an identity on the border between cultures together with an indication of the emancipatory function of a Polish school in Latvia (Urlińska, 1995b).

Political and social changes taking place in Europe at the end of the last century have encouraged a number of researchers engaged in explaining the process of integration, assimilation and adaptation of indigenous communities and moving to the Old Continent from different parts of the world (Pilch, 2000). One of the many initiatives to meet Poles living outside the country was planned and

carried out a few years in Riga since 1989 by a scientific Polish-Latvian educational experiment from Torun. We were the first who supported the idea of rebuilding the structures to educate Polish children in Latvia (at that time, there were no signed contracts for the Polish state to support the Polish language education in the East). We launched our own resources of teachers - both practitioners and social researchers, sending them into the field in order for them to become not only the witnesses of change, but also the stakeholders actively involved in these changes. To our partners from Latvia, we proposed a concept of establishing a bilingual school, where they were to be employed - in addition to local teachers of the Latvian language - including teachers seconded from the Polish language, adopted by us to the role, working according to the program prepared by a group of Polish-Latvian methodologists.

Methodology of research

Academic centres from Torun and Riga were engaged in the reconstruction of the Polish school; they were made from the plane of scientific cooperation entities on both sides of the border. Within the project, „The Laboratory of Two Universities” planned the implementation of an innovative solution (Urlińska, 1995a). At the beginning, we made interdisciplinary diagnostic tests. As a result, we had information about how the human potential comes to school, what are the psychophysical possibilities of our students, their school maturity, what they expect of the school. This knowledge was the basis for the creation of an alternative school concept by the author of this article (Urlińska, 2007).

The designing years before exploration were spent to overcome the difficult task which was the creation of the Polish school in Latvia, to present the social background, which would also test the effectiveness of our measures. The aim of this study was to describe the characteristics of the formation of an educational institution for the Polish minority. We explored the Polish school in Riga, looked at the socio-political situation in Latvia, we analysed the role of educational institutions preparing young people for life in the new reality. We were determined to answer the question of whether the school Poland in Riga, in the form proposed by us, can facilitate the children’s cultural advancement and create a civilization in the full entanglement of the multicultural borderland. With our partners, we offered bicultural, bilingual, integration, rich cultural institutions and life-giving to the school, allowing to bring out the potential of young people, enabling them to overcome their own limits. Significant time was spent on organizing information about for whom this institution is and what is its overall purpose, what were the motives of parents (grandparents) with the mission of children to this institution, whether in the selection they were guided primarily by their nationality or perhaps other factors played a more important role?

To answer the question about the role of the Polish school in the life of a student and their family, we conducted research and wrote their individual biographies for a period of school education, while they were still in the sphere of their childhoods. They started and completed primary school in Polish and then went to schools that taught in Latvian or Russian. We have created a database of information obtained in a group of 144 students and their 72 parents at a time when the children began education in Polish schools, 45 students of the first four vintages ending 17 school and their parents. For many years, we observed the functioning of students in the school (studying the maturity level of education, level of acquired knowledge to acquire competence in the national language and mother tongue), the behaviour of the peer group, and the family trips during vacations as relationships with parents and peers in Polish.

However, the main data was gathered using the technique of in-depth interviews with the children and their parents (according to a similar set of questions). The interview questionnaire contained a set of questions about their experiences of the past, present and future vision. It was about the possibilities they had in the time of commencement of education in Polish schools, expectations of the institutions and hopes for the future that it had placed. They talked about themselves, about their relations with people of the proximal and distal environment, they characterized themselves and others, talked about the environment in the near and distant world, local matters and those with a global reach. The interview was supported by participant observation, and accompanying students in everyday school life enabled us to verify the data we obtained from children and parents. With this information coming from different sources (from children, parents, teachers, school documents) we could keep the supplement knowledge of individual cases of individual students (triangulation of sources).

After a few years in another research project, we returned to our respondents studying graduates four oldest vintages 9-year-Polish school. Thanks to the measurements conducted in two different periods of life of students, our research had the nature of longitudinal studies. In the comparative study, we repeated measurements on the same people. Therefore, today we can speak about the direction and the extent of changes in the subjects studied, and - knowing what happened in the period between measurements – a conclusion about the impact of these events on a specific individual can be drawn. Research of this type allows you to track the development of these facts and analyse them in relation to the changes taking place under the influence of the pupils. We investigated the same people, we measured the characteristics in intervals of several years, we were able to track the movement of these same traits between the baseline and the finale.

Deciding on the measurement of a dynamic panel, hoping to obtain information not only about the trends occurring in the general population, but also to create a situation in which we chart an individual's profiles of variables.

Obtained thanks to the dynamics of the characteristics observed and described by us, determining what is real and the ideal picture of the world and each other in this world, an indication of the existence of the stereotype of „the Other” in a group of young people (all in connection with their national origins). The aim of this operation was to gather the material necessary to compare the development of individual units. The questions were the same as years ago and we researched a group of young people completing primary school and their parents (the first four vintages school leavers). But this time, the in-depth interview contained additional questions about the assessment years in Polish schools, its impact on the quality of life of students and to determine their own future prospects of the subjective perception of the internal situation (in Latvia) and the external situation (in Europe). The intergenerational transmission was of particular importance to us. Summary information obtained from children with those given by their parents gave us a picture of the impact of socialization in a family home.

Results of research

Thanks to our research, we witnessed the children crossing their first threshold selection. We were interested in other strategies shelled by the students appearing before another choice - this time, the school. It goes without saying that the choice of primary schools made us interested in the answer to the question whether the decision to send the children to a particular school remained satisfactory by the end of primary school. In time, the young people acquired an overall idea of how their future life should look like. Some of them associated their plans with Latvia, some wanted to go to Poland, so bilingual and bicultural education was given a chance in a way.

The school gave knowledge and freedom, because thanks to the acquired competence, students have a choice. Multiplying cultural competence increased the pool of offers for shaping the national identity of students. Studies have shown that this institution has posed the possibility of integration of different cultural symbols (Polish, Latvian, Russian), multiplying the unit with a chance to choose a positive identity, allowing them to be culturally Polish while remaining as loyal and full-fledged citizens of Latvia. The Polish has also become a meeting place and the opportunity for mutual contacts between Poles living in Latvia and their relationship with the country of their ancestors. Trips to Poland organized by the school were for many parents the only possibility to connect with the mother country and the contact with the teacher posted to work with the Polish students, became a key element for the acquisition by children (and their parents and grandparents), the cultural competence in the field of language, acquiring knowledge about Poland and its traditions and culture.

After more than twenty years, we have returned to our pupils - today already adults. The research group is now comprised of thirty people, with a group of 45

graduates (twice in the past by our respondents). We ask them today if the school Poland in the proposed form facilitated the cultural advancement in the full entanglement space of the multicultural border, or bicultural and bilingual school and its integration was so rich culturally, that today - in hindsight to the effect of its actions – it can be deduced that the school helped to bring out their potential, enabling them to surpass their own limits as adults. The information about for whom this institution was established and why it had a chance, what is their drive in evaluating the decisions taken by their parents on the choice for them, this very institution, which, including the role played by national origin of parents and whether there were other factors is very important to us. Whether they consider their school in Poland as an educational institution, giving a compendium of knowledge, skills and competences they needed in a complex and ambiguous world, has been successful in implementing the functions of emancipation, or giving them additional language skills increased the pool of tenders for selecting their own national identity.

In our previous studies, we asked a question whether organizing the participation of our educational establishment situated on the border of the medium helped in the process of empowerment of students and shaped their identity. If knowledge is a tool and a means of emancipation, the key is the answer to the question of how to gain the knowledge and how to use it, how it can serve the empowerment of students, liberation and transgression. During our exploration, there were also questions about their own identification of subjects with a sense of being rooted in some culture on the subjective belief of respondents about their own individuality and uniqueness of awareness of what distinguishes the individual from others, which demonstrates the continuity of the culture, and is derived from the resultant behaviour of members of a given society. Given that sense of belonging is one of the elementary human needs, in a situation of borderland inability to identify with one group, a feeling of tearing is generated, which affects the effectiveness of the unit (Sobecki, 1995:129). Hence, it is important that a person living in the conditions of contact of two cultures can determine their national affiliation, as well as have a place that can be called their homeland. But that membership was not just a label, it must be a complemented consciousness rooted in the culture of the nation, to which a person feels a sense of belonging.

As mentioned above, the category and the leading subject of research in many years of the project was the social identity of the individual. And the subject of the research school and its student located in the border area, in a situation when you put the question about *who is?*, *where?*, *is it the national group that identifies itself?*. It is unique and strange to our respondents, because the areas the impact of different national cultures, the individual is faced with constantly having to answer these questions. While seeking answers, our student chooses a convenient variant of a pool of multiple offers. Their awareness of cultural

identity is the result of contact with the group, and a way of defining itself through belonging to various social groups. Knowing oneself gives a person a chance to understand others, the chance of intercultural integration. Understanding the sense of identity and behaviour associated with this sensation are constantly changing. There are different reading of the identity of its meaning and manifestations. Among these feelings, also those that lead to highlight the differences, not taking into account certain relationships, but there are also those that build their own identity on the basis of similarities.

In the process of the formation of identity on borderlands, there comes a situation where ambiguity forms hybrids. We question whether they were created in graduate school, as the Polish word “hybrid” identities using a creative possibilities frontier, inherent in the development opportunities. It is used in unclear situations that await young people entering adult life. The ambivalence and the cultural diversity do not reduce the chance of acquiring cultural competence necessary in the case of free movement of people across borders of the multicultural Europe. The difference is the value of common equity and is not subject to reduction. But rather, how to diagnose the difference and how to read it.

Discussion

The empirical material collected by us includes knowledge about typical behaviours and differences of human potential (Urlińska, 2007). How it can be used? Tadeusz Lewowicki proposes to impose them on the map of certain areas of dominant behaviour identity (Lewowicki, 1995). This leads to the separation of elements typical behaviour identity. With respect to national groups analysis of these areas helps in the understanding of many of their behaviours. It seems that the primary determinant of social aspirations of a particular nationality is separateness and independence. Even if they satisfied the needs associated with the culture, language, religion is a tool to obtain statehood. On the other hand, there are known cases of the community having their own state organisms, but not having a well-developed culture and education, striving with special emphasis on the development of language, culture and traditions.

Such a situation takes place in Latvia - part of the former Soviet Union. The inclusion of a force independent states to the composition of the expansive powers (the Soviet) had to raise an objection of those who for years felt like a stranger in their own country. Even while maintaining the possibility of teaching in the mother tongue (Latvian schools were, although considered as worse), Latvians saw themselves as a group impaired, worse, marked by a lack of freedom at home. The question of independence and the separation of state have proved to be particularly important and liberated the energy to work for independence. At the same time (as if in retaliation) it has intensified in them the tendencies to eliminate

minority groups, lack of tolerance for their presence (password Latvia for Latvians), even if it was indigenous (arrived to the area in the distant past).

At the same time, some ethnically distinct groups (such as the Polish minority in Latvia), characterized by specific features, very earnestly seek identification with a social group or a terrain (such as Polish Livonia). The ties that part of the territory of Latvia Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth left in the consciousness of the Latvian Poles traces of the ancient past, the significant role of the Catholic Church, a community of fate and a sense of autonomy in the region. In a situation so complicated (the colonization of Livonia Polish neighbours), the influence of the cultures of Russian and Latvian Poles living in areas in the past associated with Polish is so strong that it becomes the basis of (and necessity) not only doubling, but tripling identity (identity Russian, Latvian citizenship, a sense of connectedness with Poland). Not noted in this case, the aspirations of separatist (a combination of Polish) if it is, only meet with the desire to emigrate for educational purposes, for work, escape from the expansion of Latvian culture (from which part of the Russian-Latvian Poles not identify, and Latvia considers country unfriendly and foreign).

Another of the highlighted areas of national identity and behaviour identity is distinct cultures, languages, customs, and sometimes religion. A child at the moment of birth finds the language as something existing. At the later stages of your life, it speaks the language of which they have learned in the family, and therefore it takes certain values and way of feeling the world. The process of socialization is done through the language of symbols, characteristic of a certain group, for a given environment. Entering the world of the symbolic meanings of a particular social group, it acquires a specific language and cultural identity. Maintain the language and culture occupies an important place in societies lacking a national state. Duration of language, culture helps to keep the identity of this community, which thanks to timely tackles to gain statehood if not, it certainly subjectivity.

And here an important place in the Polish environment in Latvia is education, including promoting the organization - the Union of Poles in Latvia. The role of existing institutions and associations was crucial to sustain the culture and language at a time when attempts introduce Russian or Soviet values in all residents. It is difficult to overestimate the role of educational institutions (in the times of Soviet Latvia) for maintaining the national identity of minorities in this country. Where such structures are observed tendencies in the development of culture, and the activities are for this kind of norm, not subject to discussion. However, where there has been a lack of activation of the local environment of the minority to the creation of a framework to support the process of transferring the culture and language.

This was a trend seen by us in Latvia. Activists ZPL and generation of older Poles who remember the times of pre-war cultural pluralism and the functioning

of Polish schools in the country, sought to create a network of institutions that can help the development of young what is important in the culture of the nation - national identity. However, it needed the support of the state structures (Latvian or Polish). It was a recognition by the majority because of the actions of minorities, and to obtain economic support for the system of alternative schools. In the case of Latvia it was accompanied by understanding the Latvian most of the needs of the Polish national minority (strategic action that obtain minority for the cause of maintaining so difficult regained independence Latvia), although with caution treating the problem to the new situation just as great claims reported no Russian minority (a problem heavily politicized historical reasons and the saturation of the inhabitants of Latvia element Russian).

In order to make sure that the awakening of national identity does not lead to nationalism, there is a need to draw attention to ethnic attitudes. We enter the third distinguished by Tadeusz Lewowicki area of behaviour identity, that is, the genealogy of historical images of diversity, specificity personality traits and behaviours. Each of the ethnic groups perceived by a prism. It consists of a generalized (and sometimes false, deliberately falsified) picture group. Often the statement „This is a typical Pole, a Russian, a Jew” sets a man in opposition to the other. Images divided into „their” and „foreign” are full of stereotypical colours. An important element of self-determination is to have some identification (preferably based on the positive stereotypes). The impact of education here will include the elimination of ethnic stereotypes, or reducing negative stereotypes, reducing the distance inter-ethnic, change any attitudes of hostility to curiosity (Chlewiński & Chickens, 1992; Urlińska, 1995:71). This is important in identifying the group of minority surrounded by „other”.

The fourth area concerns the economic condition of the economy and the level of civilization of the country. Sometimes, it is an important element to choose their own identification. In recent years, often it states that the theme is a priority. The choice of national identity is dictated material respects, Jolanta Miluska says in this case the identity of the commercial (Nikitorowicz, Sobecki & Misiejuk, 2001). Achieving a higher standard of living means that individual chooses convenient for the Placing high in the social hierarchy (today's material status is a significant position on the ladder desired value). The choice by parents of Polish school for their children frequented dictated by the desire to provide further education in the country of their ancestors, then go permanently to the Polish, which is considered the country with a higher level of development and greater opportunities for implementing their own ambitions.

The Polish school was regarded as a kind of springboard needed to exit from the world hostile to the proverbial paradise. Declarations of parents and children themselves about wanting to go to the Polish were not uncommon, especially that related to the reluctance to settle down life in the country, which was perceived as unfriendly. Not spoiled Russian citizens, in addition, if the newcomers from

other countries of the former Soviet Union (in the past they have also moved to Latvia due to higher living standards and greater development opportunities). While another is receiving the material conditions (as those relevant to behaviour identity) in a group of Poles - indigenous and is in addition of Polish and Latvian cultural competence, well embedded in both cultures. For them the material conditions and the standard of living in Latvia, is a secondary element in the prism define themselves, a sense of location and behaviour in accordance with that belief.

Conclusions

The complexity of the issues of identity and behaviour related to its sense makes it difficult to describe the problem and interpret. Examples of behaviour identity illustrate the durability of the components of national identity and diversity of behaviours associated with belonging to the group. Moreover, we observe the following changes in the understanding of identity and behaviour associated with a sense of identity. Reference behaviour of particular groups to the landmarks of national identity reveals that minority groups are seeking to play or formation of these identity elements, which are the weakest and most vulnerable. We noted that these are the main motives of behaviour associated with the reconstruction of schools in Latvia. It is not surprising in the behaviour of the organizers (aimed at the restoration of pre-war structures of schools) tendency to displace differences as threatening the autonomy of the sense of Polishness. It is dominant among activists and grandparents of our students. We watched the appearance in their action strategies to eliminate diversity as something that can disrupt the process of shaping national identity. You can observe that today preserve identity they are not based on classical elements previously regarded as a typical national identity. The change is functioning model notions of national identity, whether the model of behaviour associated with the preservation of identity. Themes opt for identification are sometimes quite surprising, because formed under the influence of contemporary preferred the concept of survival. Knowledge of past experience and current problems (not just a minority group, but also the most part) as well as proper reading of the global trends can understand the individual and group.

In the changing political minorities is hoped for political equality and free development of their own culture, education, national identity. We assumed in the study that the operation of the entity is closely related to his consciousness and self-awareness, the perception and define themselves and others, with a picture of yourself, how the entity itself produces. It is the subjective perception of each other by the unit. Accepted distinguish two aspects of the individual's sense of identity: personal and social. For a sense of personal identity units consist of „awareness of their consistency in time and space in different periods of life, in

social situations and performed roles, as well as awareness of their own identity, individuality, uniqueness.” (Jarymowicz, Szustrowa, 1980:442) shapes in response to a question about who I am and where I came from, with which past and present identified a man looking for the ideal solution. In contrast, a sense of social identity of the individual to different groups and social categories. It is a specific type of self-knowledge, along with the emotional importance assigned to this knowledge by the unit. The specificity of this self-knowledge lies in the fact that it relates to the subject, the way of living and experiencing the world based on the created by him self-image, with significant social identification and reference.

Social bonds are extremely important for every person and their social functioning. They are the link between the fate of the individual with the fate of the nation allow people to determine their nationality. It remains in close relation with a sense of rootedness (in terms of social, historical, cultural) or with the knowledge of having one’s own place in the world. It is impossible to overstate the importance of the past in which grows the unit for shaping her sense of identity. When the unit is in any way deprived of their past (whether due to changes in social, cultural, civilization or as a result of migration), it can be assumed that it remains without impact to its sense of identity and identity descendants (Melchior, 1990).

So in the case of complex identification criteria that appear in our investigated dilemmas of self-determination, looking for answers to the question how, in this situation, our respondents cope with its own identity. Does the need to opt for identification can become a problem, for example, when an individual is faced with more options when they cannot find for themselves patterns or signs, when for some reason they feel deprived of their roots? Social identity to our students is all the identification acquired during all interactions with other human beings, including primarily the assimilation patterns of behaviour and value systems transmitted in the family.

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