THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE LEARNING IN THE MODERN CONTEXT

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Abstract. Since the individual effectiveness of one's action has been proposed as one of the main demands of modern society, competence has become a crucial element for evaluating an individual. In the period of change created by the reforms of the educational system, it is important from a pedagogical viewpoint to provide students with relevant information and to promote their knowledge. And yet, it is even more important to teach students how to think, analyze and act as well as how to take responsibility and reach their goals. However, if the information within the content of education is not relevant to the realities that we face as well as the challenges of our time, if it does not promote the necessary competences and the school does not teach civic responsibility, then the actions of adolescents may not be civically responsible in the future. The publication characterizes the possibilities for modern adolescents to discover and to develop their social competence through the pedagogical process. Their social competence is the basis for their actions in the future and their actions will shape the future local, national and global events. The data that was acquired in this research confirms the necessity for a civically responsible education as well as the possible ways to achieve a civically responsible education through the focused implementation of the method- debating in the classes of the English language. The basis of value and the self-regulating expressions of responsibility, acquired through the learning of competences, are motivating the student to act with social responsibility that is directed towards him/herself, towards others and towards the entire society.
Keywords: debating, responsibility, social responsibility, socially responsible education, student.

Introduction

Some of the most important goals of education are social effectiveness and the participation in the social activities, thus it is very important to gain understanding about the processes within the society. The social meaning of education is implemented through communication with others. Education is a social process (Dewey, 1939). The tendencies of the development of the modern world significantly impact the content and the goals of education. And thus „the goals of the pedagogical process have to be considered in the context of the social processes" (Žogla, 1994, 113). It must be noted that even though the modern digital age can provide students with a large amount and variety of information, often the students/adolescents feel isolated from the society around them and the processes within it. In a research carried out in 2015 that is focused towards the

options for identification, analysis and the overcoming of modern challenges which influence the participation (the return) of adolescents (18-24 years) in the lifelong process of education. The research (n=352) points out that: „the school subjects are becoming too complicated if the learning process is linked to mechanical memorization/remembering, furthermore, regardless of the level of study achievements, the difficulty of a subject can be linked to it not being relevant to real life and being focused towards the mechanical memorization of facts. Thus, it is necessary to link the difficult subject to the development of the ability to reason and to link the subject to real life situations" (Maslo, 2015, 30). The research emphasizes that not only the cognitive but also the social presence is important in the study process. It also points out that „the positive learning experience is not always linked to cognitive development although it nearly always is linked to a positive emotional feeling of wellbeing, often a feeling of social wellbeing". It also points out various quotes from students, for example „I do not embrace the first information that I find on the internet or that is taught to me. I verify it" (Maslo, 2015, 54). Thus it is necessary to integrate modern events into the content of education which would not only promote the learning of knowledge but also promote a sense of certainty of being able to influence the global events which would turn feelings like despair and helplessness into the generation of possibilities. If the students only receive information about a problem or a recent event but do not explore it more thoroughly and do not invent the possible solutions, then an awareness of a "dead end" is created. Negative and tendentious information about the events in the society can also promote the awareness of a "dead end". However, by exploring the problem, by sharing feelings about the problem and creating solutions for it, the "invention of possibilities" can take place (Berman, 1990).

It must be admitted that it is crucial for the adolescents to realize that their actions can directly influence the local, national and global events but the individual regards and beliefs of the student are very important factors for the process of the development of social responsibility. „The question: „Why are we doing this? „ is important to the formation of attitudes. It is important for the new generation to see the answer to their question 'Why?' in all of the surrounding processes. We must recognize the fact that the attention span of the students is becoming less persistent and thus we must constantly find new approaches/ methods." (Latvijas Skolu psihologu asociācija, 2012, 27). Thus more importance can be given to the implementation of methods that shape the personal attitudes of the students and methods that emphasize the cognitive processes of the students as the source for new opportunities and alternatives.

A research (n=1063) about the opportunities, attitudes and values of adolescents conducted by the Latvian Ministry of Science and Education in 2013 emphasizes that   „the willingness or unwillingness to participate in public, social and political activities defines the confidence of the adolescents about their

abilities of their actions to influence the global events". Unfortunately the research reveals that only 21% of adolescents believe that their personal actions can influence global events, while 53% believe that their personal actions only have a minor influence on global events but 26% believe that, their personal actions do not influence global events at all. Through analyzing the popularity of modern challenges the research reveals that even though the adolescents are relatively well informed about climate change (67%) and human rights (61%), only half of the adolescents admit being informed about globalization (53%), international cooperation (49%), migration (48%) and environmental sustainability (48%). However, the adolescents are not well informed about the questions of sustainable development, fair trade, international security and other questions (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, 2013, 39-40). Every adolescent must realize that „global problems largely influence the adolescents of Europe for example, violation of basic rights, economic inequality and the degradation of environment. We have to express solidarity with the rest of the world in the battle against discrimination. We have to do this by helping others and by caring for the environment" (Eiropas Kopienu komisija, 2009, 10). However if the content of education does not emphasize its relevance to the major challenges of the modern world and the school does not carry out a socially responsible form of learning then as a consequence the behaviors of the adolescents may not be socially responsible in the future.

The need for a socially responsible education is emphasized by the fact that the adult citizens of Latvia are often not willing to act within the context of the challenges posed by the modern world. The Center of Security and Strategic Research of the Latvian National Academy of Defense has conducted the research: *The possibility of the destabilization of the society of Latvia: potential threats to national security* (2016) points out that the majority of people do not believe that their actions can change anything, and it is also concluded that: „the political and social activity of the society of Latvia is very low" (Bērziņa, 2016, 28). The data reveals lack of ability of the society of Latvia to influence the world around them and it is also revealed that being inactive is regarded as a social norm (Bērziņa, 2016, 13).

The European Commission has emphasized the importance of the society in the process of creation and testing the knowledge. Also the fact that the values of the society determine the current events in science has been highlighted. And it must be admitted that, the co-operation of school and the society is focused on a single goal - achievement of active citizenship (Boucher et al., 2014). Thus, to form each student`s understanding of himself/herself as a part of society and promote the desire to be a responsible citizen of the country, socially responsible learning process at school must be implemented. „We live in the time when the teacher must awaken student`s wish to improve the world from the local to the global" (Wolk, 2009, 665).

So the goal of the publication is: on the basis of the analysis of theoretical findings to identify and characterize the social responsibility and socially responsible learning as well as to clarify the students' understanding of the possibilities for individual self-realization in a socially responsible action context. The research methods are the analysis of theoretical literature and normative base as well as the empirical research: survey (n=20).

The implementation of social responsibility in the learning process

The responsibility can be defined as the consequences of a particular action, determined by the expression of an attitude, e.g. gratitude, or guilt, etc. It sets and drives human action (Oshana, 1997). Responsibility is clearly a regulatory form of human activity. It is expressed in the attitude towards oneself, others and society as a whole. Its major components are rational, emotional and expressions of the will. Responsibility has diverse forms of expression, e.g. the moral, legal, economic responsibility. Concept of responsibility is characterized with the number of levels:

- high level of responsibility: all decisions are taken in the accordance with the internal system of values. The person takes responsibility for the decisions, actions and consequences in the long term. High level of responsibility has become the personality trait;
- medium level of responsibility: in the contrast to the high level of responsibility, a person assumes responsibility for the decisions, actions and the consequences in the short term;
- low level of responsibility: individual responsibility is manifested only in certain life situations. It depends on a human nature and external conditions;
- irresponsibility: not developed internal value system, control of activities and self-regulation, a person has a fear of responsibility, or he/she is unable to make decisions independently.

Responsibility can take various forms: the responsibility for himself/herself; responsibility for himself/herself and family; responsibility for himself/herself and family, and the society as a whole (Тутушкина, 2001). It is important to be aware of the fact that responsibility, as well as the internal factor of freedom are essential preconditions for the free expression of the will in the form of human activity, decision-making, and etc. (Fisher, 2005).

Being aware that responsibility manifests in different life situations, the concept of social responsibility has been updated and defined relatively recently (in 2010) and is mainly associated with the social responsibility in the field of business. International Organization for Standardization (International Organization for Standardization) has defined the concept of social responsibility as "the responsibility for the decisions and activities that affect society and the

environment, acting ethically and openly" (International Organization for Standardization, 2010, ISO 26000).

It must be admitted that the specificity of social responsibility is „the individual's contribution to the well-being of human and the entire world" (Berman, 1997, 15), building citizenship and strengthening confidence in the need for public benefit (Wolk, 2009). Psychiatrist and philosopher, the founder of analytical psychology schools Carl Gustav Jung emphasized, "that what is necessary to the society as a whole, it is also necessary for every individual, because society is formed of individuals" (Jung, 1999, 156).

The forming components of social responsibility are: empathy, the understanding of social conventions, the will, social and political education (Berman, 1990). While socially responsible learning includes:

- civic education (to become a responsible citizen, awareness of common goals, participation in decision-making, the awareness of collective performance);
- social skills (cooperation, conflict resolution, recognizing the possibility of other people, opportunities for investment in the community, group work, understanding of real-life events, information gathering and analysis, critical thinking, organizational skills, group problem-solving ability, ability to find a common solution, joint problem-solving skills, ability to think in the long term);
- action: student participation in the activities of the society, launching the debate, discussions, participation in community service, awareness of belonging to society, extracurricular school work, individual and collective action of good practice, demonstration of certain social standards, peer support programs, etc. (Berman, 1990; Wolk, 2009).

The position of student in the socially responsible learning process

Social responsibility is based on values, because social responsibility is formed by value orientation that motivates individual behavior (Wray-Lake Syvertsen, 2011). This set of values is determined by the family and society. And the school is just a continuation of a socially responsible learning. The family and society as a whole, provides learning "direction", which significantly affects the learning content. Thus not only the family and the school, but the whole community transfers the values, traditions, skills and cultural norms to the next generation (Bouguila, 2013). Definitely a student is in the center of a socially responsible learning process and while socially responsible learning process student becomes responsible "through himself/herself". Thus, „through himself/herself" the student understands the necessities of the others and the necessities of all the society in general. "To become socially responsible means to understand the wishes of others" focusing on the relations of a personality,

society and policy in the micro and macro level. It emphasizes each individual's deep relationship with the world (Berman, 1990) and an important learning process becomes both a pupil's individual and social self-realization (Figure No.1).
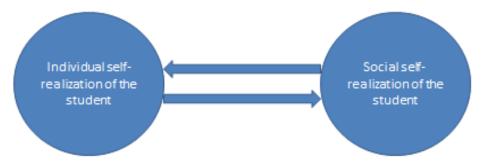

Figure 1. **Student's self-realization in a socially responsible learning process**

It is important that a socially responsible learning "combines processes of both society and education" (Wladkowski, 2008). Assessing the current problems, it can be concluded that not every problem, situation, the challenge may be followed by immediate action. However, a student will be responsible for action in future. Sustainable action is also important in any situation. Nowadays, the teacher should consider not only *What he/she teaches*, but also *How he/she teach*es. The change begins with our attitude. However, in order to link the curriculum with contemporary world events, students' understanding encouraging methods are crucial. And "cognitive activity is possible only if there is a cognitive task or problem" (Žogla, 1994, 153). Thus, it can be concluded that a socially responsible learning enables a student to be in an active position in studying and understanding the community through updating in a variety of real-life situations own individual experience.

Basing on theoretical knowledge (Berman, 1990; Wolk, 2009, Wladkowski, 2008, Žogla, 1994), it can be admitted that socially responsible learning process (Figure 2) occurs in the student-centered learning process by providing the student an active position and implementing socially responsible learning through promoting innovative approaches (e.g. debating). The learning content should be supplemented with information on current affairs in the society that purposefully promote student's social responsibility and socially responsible behavior. Thus:

- student gains new knowledge, linking it with the real-life facts (information on a local or global problems / challenge / situation / event);
- through debating, discussing, arguing, and etc, investigates the problem / challenge / situation;
- student is aware of the possible actions, their consequences, finds opportunities, looking for common solutions;
- shares this/her feelings;

- sets targets and implements them;
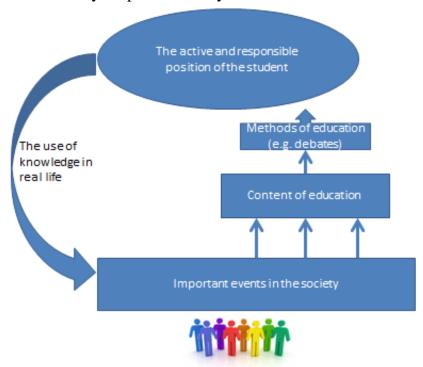- develops training competences;
- acts in a socially responsible way.

Figure 2. **Socially responsible learning process**

Evaluation of socially responsible learning in the process of debating in the foreign language lessons

The authors of the publication are willing to describe the opportunities for socially responsible learning through debating in the foreign language lessons (the English language). The sample program of the General Secondary Education Subject: the English language provides certain learning sequence and learning content as well as it sets a goal: „to promote the growth of the student as a creative personality and develop competent use of foreign language in the communication, lifelong learning and intercultural dialogue in today's society" (Kursite, 2008, 3). English language lessons thematic framework is also provided in the sample program, see table No. 1.

Table 1. **The thematic framework of the lessons of the English language**

Grade	Themes
10.	Language, art and literature, technology, sports, traveling
11.	Culture, politics, law, communication, global events
12.	Environment, business, relationships, education, health

Unfortunately, as the table No.1 shows that the included topics in the thematic framework of the lessons of the English language do not cover many important issues in the national and global context. Educational researcher Steven Wolk has developed socially responsible learning thematic framework. The included topics of the framework are: empathy; social problems and justice; government; demonstration of force; propaganda; multicultural society; historical awareness; global events; war and peace; non-violence; social vision; environment: consumer society (Wolk, 2009). We live in a time when a teacher must awaken young people's desire to improve the world from the local to the global (Wolk, 2009). So schools have to help overpower the „the feeling of helplessness „ among students by developing a sense of belonging to the society: the belief that they can build a better world (Beman, 1990). However, if important issues that are topical in a rapidly changing world are not being viewed at school, the student will be unable to individual self-realization, as well as for the becoming a part of society.

To help students understand the content of learning, emphasizing its link with a real life and the society with its constantly changing local and global challenges, thus contributing to a socially responsible learning process, the learning method - debating was implemented in the research-based school in the foreign language lessons. The debating was carried out 4 times a month about different topical in the society issues. After three years of debating experience (10, 11, 12th grade), the survey (n = 20) was carried out to determine students' understanding and views on learning outcomes.

The aim of survey was to find out students` understanding about the practical use of the competences acquired in the school as well as their confidence in their own ability to influence the events taking place in the society.

Table 2. **Students' vision for change in the world**

The students` vision	The number of students
The situation in the world will improve	16
The situation in the world won`t change	3
The situation in the world will get worse	1

As it can be seen in the table No.2 the prognosis for the future is predominantly positive. 16 students believe that the global situation will improve in the future, but only one student believes that the global situation will worsen in the future, because "the addiction to technology will degrade the world". Three of the respondents believe that the global situation will not change.

Answering the question: *How can my actions influence the life of others?*, all of the respondents believe that their actions, to some extent, have an influence on the life of others. Eight of the respondents believe that their actions

"impressively influence the lives of others". One respondent admitted that his/her "inactivity can influence the others". In the assessment of the influence on global events of their individual actions, as it is seen in the table No.3, 15 of the respondents have expressed opinion that their actions influence global events and they base their opinion with notions such as: „a big deed can arise from a small act"; „I influence the processes around me with large and small deeds"; „action is always important". 4 of the respondents have admitted that their actions have a minor influence on the global events and one student believes that his/her actions do not influence global events in any way.

Table 3. **The assessment of students' personal impact**

The students` vision	The number of students
My actions influence the global events	15
My actions have a minor influence on the global events	4
My actions do not influence global events in any way	1

Answering the question: *What can I do collectively with the society to promote the development of the society?* A multitude of ways to participate/act were mentioned: the participation in social activities (7 respondents), participation in non-governmental organizations (4 respondents), activities in global projects (2 respondents) „I am the society" (1 respondent), the creation of a positive atmosphere (1 respondent), the creation and implementation of ideas (1 respondent), charity (1 respondent), the transformation of small deeds to larger ones (1 respondent), supporting and taking action (1 respondent), active participation in environmental projects (1 respondent). It must be noted that 7 respondents have expressed their desire to participate in social activities could not note precisely in which kinds of activities. It could mean that there is a lack of realization of their options to participate. It is important to note that all of the respondents have mentioned distinct actions that they could carry out to promote the development of the society.

By evaluating their options of fulfilling the world, most respondents believe that: „one must start with him/herself" (6), four respondents emphasize the need to participate in activities of cleaning the environment, four believe that it is necessary to „take active steps", two of the respondents have expressed that one must do what „he/she can do best": „doing the things that I like and that I'm best at will be beneficial for me and the world alike", one of the respondents believes that it is crucial to „correct the mistakes made by others", one of the respondents wishes to be an example for the others, one of the respondents believes that it is necessary to provide support by creating new ideas and solutions, one student believes that the attitude must be changed, and one of the respondents expressed the opinion that it is crucial to help others.

The interviews prove that the students are confident about their actions, to some extent, influence the events in the society and the lives of others. The students are ready to participate in a multitude of social activities, non-governmental organizations, in global projects, to be active. The respondents also believe that in order to promote change in the society, one must start with him/herself.

Conclusions

1. Since active social participation is crucial in the process of education, it is necessary to integrate modern trends into the content of education which would promote the development of real life skills and competence. This would promote learning and contribute to the students' sense of belonging to the society as well as their confidence in their own abilities to change global events.
2. In the themes of the sample program of the General Secondary Education Subject (2008) many issues regarding personality, nation and the world are not covered. Examples of the issues that were left out are empathy, society; multicultural society; the acknowledgement of history; war and peace: addressing conflict without violence; social aims etc.
3. The future socially responsible behavior of the adolescents will be ensured by a socially responsible education acquired in the school and elsewhere in the presence. A socially responsible education cannot be achieved without it being linked to the real life and the challenges posed by the nowadays world.
4. The student arrives to the school with a set of values and attitudes which have been formed in the family and the surrounding society. This provides the basis for a socially responsible process of education in the school. It is important to note that the family and the society as a whole defines the content of education. Thus it is pedagogically important to choose and implement the appropriate content of education in order to carry out the approach of socially responsible education.
5. A socially responsible education is focused towards the relations between the individual, the society and politics. It emphasizes the deep connection with the world that each individual has and it combines the processes of the society and the content education. The forms and methods of the pedagogical process that are appropriately selected, can ensure the link between the acquired knowledge and real life which leads to the harmonic balance between academic knowledge ant their practical use in the form of competence.
6. The student is a part of the society; he/she learns and uses the acquired knowledge with deliberate practical activities in the society just as he/she will in the future. The activity of learning requires social recognition and

thus the goals of the pedagogical process have to be relative to the social processes. The selection of individual goals and their achievement is a crucial factor for the learning and personal growth of the student.

7. The style of socially responsible learning emphasizes the need for the implementation of new approaches and methods into the process of education. For example, by using the learning method debating, the learning of knowledge and competence is promoted and an adequate attitude is formed in regard to the events occurring in their lives and in the society.

8. The data acquired by interviewing the students, reveals their confidence in their abilities to influence the events of the society and the lives of others: the students are ready to participate in a variety of social activities, by participating in non-governmental organizations, in global projects, by emphasizing the opinion that the positive changes in the society have to begin with themselves through the learning of the skills and competences needed for being socially responsible.

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