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Regional culture traditions in the school education content — contribution to ethnopedagogy

Abstract: The contemporary trends of global development strongly alter the functioning of people in a multicultural environment. What is important, is the contents of school education which would help students find themselves in different social conditions. This notion includes regional tradition necessary to shape the identity of individuals and to prevent their alienation. The presented descriptions of the cultivation of the Silesian traditions at schools indicate that the content is presented in intentional as well as incidental school situations and extracurricular activities, and thus they cover a wide spectrum of cultural, linguistic, and artistic concepts. Their juxtaposition shows an interdisciplinary approach in the selection of the educational content, which indicates that the assumptions of ethnopedagogy are realized in the school practice. The achievement of its objectives determines the definition of the pedagogical standards aimed at engaging people in the life of the local communities.

Keywords: regional tradition, school education content, functions of cultivating traditions

Introduction

Tendencies of global development play a crucial role in the dynamics of changes at school. Migrations that nowadays occur for economic or cultural (the need to see other cultures) reasons or due to armed conflicts require certain changes in human lives. A foreign culture environment is often a source of new problems for the newcomers, in many instances resulting from their ignorance of social norms existing in the new place. Rapid cultural changes that happen on many levels of social life on a global scale, in local communities and in

the individual's life, according to Anna Brzezińska, can be characterized by the following features: multiplicity, variety and changeability of offers; mobility of individuals, groups, and communities. Due to the multiplicity of offers and an excessive amount of goods, many people might encounter certain difficulties in decision-taking and choice-making caused by focusing on the present rather than on long-term planning (Brzezińska, 2005, p. 688). Challenges of the modern civilization focus on the role of education in preparing young people for living in a new cultural environment.

The analysis of the results of the research on the understanding of multiculturalism conducted by Beata Ecler-Nocuń i Małgorzata Kitlińska-Król showed that there is a general need for discovering one's own cultural identity and understanding of the meaning of one's tradition, culture, and history, which is not contradictory to respect for other nationalities, but helps understand oneself as a human being. At the same time, the ability to change is being appreciated, thanks to which it is possible to shape one's identity that is not locked in the past (Ecler-Nocoń & Kitlińska-Król, 2013, pp. 37–42). The conducted research on functioning and learning in the culturally diversified environment gave an incentive to construct the concepts of multicultural, intercultural, and regional education. Multicultural education focuses on maintaining stable value systems and takes into account the sociocultural need for flexibility and the degree to which one can adjust to changes. If it is not possible to foresee every opportunity or risk which results from civilization changes of the modern world, everything should be done to prevent value marginalization. A definitely broader meaning of learning, teaching, and upbringing is presented within the concept of intercultural education. It involves the concept of a diversified culture, with its different values, customs, and rituals. It is not the goal of intercultural education to build a unified global culture but to broaden identities of individuals, groups, and communities by propagating tolerance and engaging into dialogue.

In regional education, the curriculum is enriched with presenting participants with regional values and issues of general human significance in order to pass them to future generations as a cultural value (Nikitorowicz, 2009).

In educational practice, apart from the formal base, there is a particular education content that is most important. The focus of this paper is therefore on the content knowledge concerning regional traditions. The term *tradition* in the linguistic sense is "a code of conduct, customs, views, knowledge, and behavior that is unique to a particular social group, passed from one generation to another and strengthened in the course of time as a set of customs (*Nowy słownik języka polskiego*, 2003).

The significance of cultural traditions in school education

The significance of cultivating traditions for the sake of students' development is valuable both in intentionally organized education as well as in self-education. In school education, the issue of cultivating traditions is perceived as an element of learners' identity formation process. Krzysztof Karwowski ("Jedność w różnorodności") associates identity with the essence, sense, or features of the self or autonomy. An individual becomes aware of his or her own different identity, when at least two cultures which perceive each other as different come into contact. This encounter might result in different types of relations between the groups: from aggression, demonstration of antagonism and dislike, signs of misunderstanding, finally to accommodation and interest. In the latter case, individuals seek information about each other, which facilitates assimilation, mutual acceptance, and cooperation.

Apart from the personal form of identity, there exists social identity. Social identity involves cultural differentness resulting from historical heritage, cultivation of basic values and acquisition of cultural patterns. The term *identity* in its narrow meaning refers to sociocultural aspects of self-perception. The definition of identity might as well be narrowed to the sociocultural aspects of perceiving ourselves in the context of affiliation to a certain social group with a certain degree of autonomy.

The value of culture in education becomes evident when some ethnic issues arouse interest. Anna Łobos (2009) defines folklore as a folk culture which includes customs, rituals, beliefs, and artistic creation in literature (fairy tales, legends, and proverbs), music (songs and dances), as well as in painting, sculpture, and decorative arts.

Aside from intentional cultural activities, traditions can also be cultivated in self-education. Folk tradition is an important component of adolescents' lives in rural areas. Bartłomiej Golek points to the significance of folk tradition in getting rid of false images of reality and countering threats related to the excess of cultural possibilities. For adolescents tradition provides trusted points of reference and the experience of the primeval and the natural (Golek, 2014). The author adduces the argument presented by Brezinka, who stated that elements of tradition have a tried-and-tested sense-creating, normative meaning. In the time of technical and financial changes, elements of tradition ensure the continuity in the ever-changing world, because they protect groups and individuals from alienation, and they connect generations (Brezinka, 2005, pp. 12—13). Supported by adults' proper attitude and school's commitment, traditions can help learners achieve cognitive and socio-moral competences, as well as to shape affirmative

and creative attitudes in the process of creating mature and consistent personality and resist a growing, harmful tendency that seems to be prevailing in society these days. Also, they can pave the way for accomplishing goals and adhering to values that are pragmatic and utilitarian in character.

Examples of maintaining regional traditions in preschools and primary schools in Upper Silesia

To follow traditions, one has to become aware of characteristic features and functions of culture in Upper Silesia. Academic texts tend to refer to the idea of “emeraldness” of the Silesians. The word, however, derives from the expression *the emerald of Europe* referring to Silesia, which was first used by the Breslau-born poet Henryk Muhlfort in the 17th century. The price of emerald depends on the amount of admixtures it contains. Silesia is a region abundant in a variety of “admixtures” of many national cultures which determine its diversity and spiritual wealth. Its geographic location at the junction of three cultures: Polish, German, and Moravian, had a great impact on Silesian rituality. Abundance of rituals stems from the Silesians’ ability to freely use the resources available in all the cultures (Szadzińska, 2009, p. 108).

One of the distinctive features of Silesia is the social egalitarianism of ethnically Polish inhabitants. Silesian society did not know class differences and conflicts within one nationality. The external expression of this egalitarianism in social behavior was the deeply rooted idea of equality, lack of servility, lack of inferiority complex with respect to those of higher social standing, high self-reliance, social maturity, and good organization of the plebeians. The conviction that egalitarianism was best developed in Silesia was a significant element of Silesians’ self-awareness. Egalitarianism and work ethos were the main values which distinguished Upper Silesia from other regions. The rigorous professional ethics was built on the basis of work as value; among the most important values were reliability, honesty, conscientiousness, respect for professional competence, solidarity, and a sense of responsibility for others. The ability to cooperate and easiness in establishing professional relations are also typical features of Silesian laborers. Such an understanding of work constituted the basis of their strong sense of self-esteem, dignity, and honor. Work was the basic criterion for evaluation. In Silesia, work was not a means of social advancement, the achievement of which used to be related to abandoning one’s ethno-linguistic group. That is why social status was not a criterion for evaluation. An individual was evaluated as a professional in terms of salary and his other qualifications,

as well as a family and local community member (Błaszczak-Waławik, Błasiak & Nawrocki, 1990, p. 14).

School is the place where regional traditions are cultivated. Helena Synowiec points to the integral relationship between education and the past, the present and the future of the local environment, based on the criteria of Truth, Goodness, Beauty and Sanctity. Education effects are experienced in creativity of many Silesians, which is worth propagating in the modern society. The author stresses the significance of intellectual cognition and the individuals' emotional relationship with the local environment, their involvement in current problems of the surrounding reality and its active creation in regional education (Synowiec, 1997, p. 11).

The material presented below, which concerns the issue of regional traditions in preschool and primary school education, is a result of the analysis of contents goals, preschool and primary school curricula found on the institutions' websites. The aim of the analysis was to describe the education content concerning regional traditions. The analysis of the data allowed the author to distinguish the following categories of the education content concerning local traditions.

1. The content of educational projects presented in school classes.

On February 18—21, the project “Regional Week in Our School” was carried out in our school. The educational project was part of regular classes aimed to broaden the knowledge of our region (an hour a day during one week). The previous week, pupils and their teachers had created an artistic program “What is close to our hearts...” — a musical-theatrical presentation. The “Regional Week in Our School” project was based on the core curriculum of general education in primary schools (for more see <http://zspkobyła.kornowac.pl/>).

2. The content of educational projects presented in extracurricular classes.

One of the school traditions is the carnival ball for the forms 1—3. Its aim is to cultivate the custom of common entertainment for all the pupils, who can fulfill their dreams and dress up as characters from fairy tales and regional legends. Music is always played by a befriended music band; teachers prepare competitions in which pupils who are “invisible” in the school's daily life may succeed. Our goal is to involve all the pupils in this entertainment and help them overcome shyness and lack of self-confidence (Primary School no. 3 in Środa Śląska, for more see <http://www.sp-srodaślaska.ogicom.pl>).

3. The education content introduced in intentionally organized situations that serve to engage students in content knowledge construction.

In the Primary School no. 13 in Żory, the “Regional Days” were organized once again. In course of the “Regional Days,” classes devoted to Silesian traditions and customs were conducted, and pupils were told legends from Żory. Young residents of our town visited also the school regional hall and

went for an outing to a befriended school in Katowice (“Regional Days” in the Primary School no. 13 in Żory, for more see: <http://www.zs6zory.pl>).

4. The educational content used in activities performed in cooperation with the community.

“Countryside in the past” is a name of traditional festivities which are organized by the parents’ council, teachers, and pupils in the Adam Wodziczka Primary School in Rogalinki. The main idea of these festivities was to present to the young people and children how everyday life and holidays looked like in the country; thus, seasonal work on the land and following folk traditions were the main themes of the festivities. The community event was aimed at integrating residents of the village in which all the pupils attend the same school. In the village, there live multigenerational families strongly related to the local rituals, customs and traditions, “strongly tied to their own place on earth,” their small homeland (Silesian traditions — customs, celebrations, feasts, folk costumes, language, and legends. For more see <http://www.zso12.gliwice.pl/index.php/konkursy/>).

5. The education content as a foundation for activities in stable conditions.

In the project “Trances of the past — students adopt monuments,” together with the students from the school community we have taken care of a grave of third Silesian uprising insurgents. A moving and beautiful ceremony took place in the Sośnica cemetery, in the presence of the insurgents’ descendants, representatives of municipal authorities, school management and Sośnica residents, the students signed an act of adoption. Now the act is displayed in the school’s corridor to remind students about their commitment to take care of the grave, bring flowers and light candles on public holidays, anniversaries of the Silesian uprisings and on All Saints’ Day (Stefan Żeromski Primary School no. 14 in Gliwice, for more see http://www.sp14.brojek.com/side/jasinska_kunas.pdf).

6. The education content used to reconstruct activities in intentionally organized situations.

In Upper Silesia, yearly rituality is strongly related to the church calendar and folk beliefs. Folk and religious motifs often merge. In Silesian tradition, there are many seasonal customs and rituals. In spring and summer, they include: drowning an effigy of *Marzanna* to celebrate the end of winter; going with *gaik* ‘a decorated twig’ (country folks’ spring festival); going with wooden rattles during Holy Week; Easter customs and rituals; Corpus Christi procession; Midsummer Night; and Silesian *dożynki* (parochial harvest festival). In autumn and winter, the following customs and rituals are cultivated: Advent fasting; fortune-telling on St. Andrew’s Day (November 29); St. Nicholas’ Day (on which children get presents and sweets) (December 6); forecasting next year’s crops and weather (St. Lucy’s Day, December 13); Christmas customs; carol singing; the carnival tradition of walking

a bear; *babski comber* (women's party); the end of carnival celebrations; and family customs and rituals. The main aim of all the customs and rituals is to make every individual feel the support of the community in every moment of his or her life.

In the above presented descriptions of educational practice in preschools and primary schools in Upper Silesia, the education content includes the community life information. It is very important that educational practice should involve references to patterns of behavior, which have an impact on the beauty of our life, everyday chores, our role in the community, as well as on our understanding of others.

Conclusions

Including in pedagogy issues specific for other disciplines, such as linguistics, cultural anthropology and ethnography makes the development of ethnopedagogy possible. The presented education content concerning regional traditions indicates such a tendency.

In every ethnographic region, there are different customs, traditions, and historical heritage. That is why referring to this content knowledge is important for children's identity-creation and self-education. In the rapidly globalizing world, people attach significance to local traditions; this also happens in other ethnic culture domains. It is an inexhaustible resource. Elements of ethnic culture can be successfully used in preschools and primary schools. Introducing children to traditional culture, the teacher can shape their system of moral principles and human values, and develop their sense of beauty, creativity, and respect for life and admiration of nature.

Cultivation of regional traditions at school performs many vital functions — that is, educational, cognitive, and social. It broadens children's knowledge, develops their national consciousness, strengthens family bonds, and contributes to local community integration.

In modern pedagogy, the phenomenon called *renaissance of regionalism* (also called *ethnic awakening*, *getting back to one's roots*, or *taking roots in one's local homeland*) attracts much attention and can be observed in the whole modern world, in Europe, and in the post-transformation Poland. According to Henryk Skorowski (2006), Polish regionalism consists in getting back to authentic local communities and their self-governance.

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