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Folk Pedagogy as an Important Means of Developing Prospective Primary School Teachers' Multicultural Competence

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Abstract

Folk pedagogy is an important means of developing multicultural competence of future primary school teachers. In 2018-2019, at the Department of Pedagogy and Methods of Pre-School and Primary Education of the Birsk Branch of Bashkir State University (Republic of Bashkortostan), we conducted a research study aimed at the theoretical justification and experimental verification of pedagogical conditions that promote the effective development of the prospective primary school teacher's multicultural competence on the basis of using the means of folk pedagogy. Taking into consideration the multiethnic and multilingual group of students, consisting of the representatives of Russian, Bashkir, Tatar and Mari nationalities, we used the means of folk pedagogy of these ethnic groups in the educational process. The results of the investigation confirmed the hypothesis. Eventually, we came to the conclusion that using the elements of folk pedagogy considerably promotes the development of prospective teachers' multicultural competence.

Keywords: folk pedagogy; multicultural competence; prospective teacher; knowledge; skills; culture.

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Introduction

Teacher educators normally use a variety of techniques and strategies while preparing future teachers. In addition to conceptualizing and implementing the principles, aims and content of basic teacher education programs, they frequently refer to integration of a teacher preparation process with folk pedagogy. Throughout Russia the category of pedagogy, including folk pedagogy, has historically

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encompassed two intertwined categories: an idea of teaching and an idea of upbringing. Unlike Russia, in the Western educational tradition, the term “education” has taken a deeper root (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2006a; Cushner, 2006). Folk pedagogy is closely related to the indigenous traditions of child development and deeply ingrained in human nature and human culture (Akhiyarov, 2000; Latishina, 2014; Volkov, 1999). The means of folk pedagogy of different ethnic groups have much in common, as they are normally based on value patterns characteristic of the entire human race. Folk pedagogy is closely interrelated with multicultural education. Among other important strategies, multicultural education draws on the outcomes of indigenous and folk pedagogical research to address the diversity of students (Sinagatullin, 2002).

Problem statement and purpose of study

The traditional, historically-proven approaches and methods with reference to children and teenagers or, in other words, folk pedagogical approaches, which are used by parents, relatives, and community members in educating children and which had been used by the predecessors, have always played an important role in children’s personality and cognitive development. Folk pedagogy represents a complex of intertwined ideas, notions, and viewpoints as well as strategies and techniques of education and child development, which are common to a wide range of ethnic groups. Folk pedagogy leads a child and an adult along the main road of universal values and is based on complete properties and essence of man, as well as on the qualities peculiar to all human society. Folk pedagogy aims at developing an individual on the ideas of kindness, tolerance, beauty, and truth and is continually being conceptualized and implemented by people. Among the most renowned Russian scholars and educators who have contributed and advanced the ideas of folk pedagogy, we can name Ushinsky, Volkov and Akhiyarov. The fundamentals and principles of folk pedagogy make a considerable impact on the enhancement of ideas, principles, aims and content of multicultural education (Mashtakova, 2006; Sinagatullin, 2015; Yarmieva, & Sinagatullin, 2006).

The purpose of this study can be substantiated as follows: (1) attracting attention of the teaching/learning public to the important issues of folk pedagogy and how it influences the development of future primary school teachers’ multicultural competence, (2) substantiating theoretically and empirically the necessity of developing future primary school teachers’ multicultural competence by means of folk pedagogy, and (3) providing a path for the future research on multicultural education and related issues.

Research questions

Proceeding from the previous considerations on folk pedagogy and related issues, we put forward the following research questions:

- Why is it important to take into consideration the issues of folk pedagogy while preparing future teachers’ multicultural competence?
- What are major ethno-psychological characteristics of ethnic groups inhabiting the Republic of Bashkortostan?
- Why is it important for a candidate teacher to become a multiculturally competent individual?
- What are the important means of folk pedagogy and how can they be used to better develop prospective teachers’ multicultural abilities and proficiency?

Methodology

The experiment was conducted at the Department of Pedagogy and Methods of Pre-School and Elementary Education at the Birsk Branch of Bashkir State University in 2018-2019 academic year. The participants were 12 third-year students. The study was guided by the authors and a group of the Department faculty members. The study involved the use of the following methods: reviewing pedagogical and psychological literature on human diversity, folk pedagogy, multicultural education and relevant issues; elaborating the pedagogical modeling method; delivering questionnaires to collect the needed data; interviewing; testing; organizing personal conversations; and conducting a pedagogical experiment.

The model for developing prospective teachers' multicultural competence on the basis of folk pedagogy consisted of goal-oriented, content-oriented and operational components. The goal-oriented component included the purpose of research and the issues of how to make the students feel determined to enhance their multicultural competence. The content-oriented component was responsible for the means of folk pedagogy that teacher educators used to develop the students' multicultural knowledge-base. The operational component included techniques and strategies aimed at developing the students' overall multicultural competence and proficiency. As a whole, the Department staff was faced with two tasks, i.e. how to enhance future teachers' multicultural competence, and at the same time how the future teachers could transfer this to primary schools that will be in their charge.

During the experiment we calculated the parameters of prospective teachers' multicultural competence along the continuum from the low to medium and on to high grade by using the three-grade criterion: high, medium and low grades. In numbers the high grade equated with an indicator from 21 to 30; the medium grade – from 11 to 20; the low grade – from 1 to 10. We conjectured that prospective teachers with a high grade of multicultural competence should possess a relatively strong knowledge base on folk pedagogy and understand how folk pedagogy makes a positive impact on enhancing their multicultural competence. Consequently, the medium grade of prospective teachers' competence corresponded to a lower level of these characteristics. The low grade was in accordance with still lower characteristics. We measured the prospective teachers' multicultural competence at the initial stage of the experiment and also after conducting it at the end of the academic year. The faculty members had a good understanding of what folk pedagogy is, what means and factors of folk pedagogy exist in different cultures, and how to use the rich arsenal of folk pedagogy in developing the candidate teachers' multicultural horizons.

We began the investigation by discussing the fundamental issues of folk pedagogy and multicultural education while instructing the lecture courses such as “Pedagogy” and “Methods of Teaching and Upbringing in the Primary School”, thus providing students with an appropriate theoretical basis. While studying these courses future teachers came to learn that different cultures boast different means and factors of folk pedagogy. On a generalized level, such means as lullabies, anecdotes and amusing stories, proverbs and sayings, riddles, fairy tails, play, folk music, and folk dance frequently used among different ethnic and cultural groups.

Student teachers gained insights into the fact that a powerful vehicle of folk pedagogy is *proverb* that usually incorporates folk philosophy and folk psychology. In many cultures, there are proverbs that demonstrate the same ideas. For example, the Russian proverb “It is nice to be a guest at someone's home, but your own home is the best place” equals in meaning to the English proverb “East or west - home is best”. In this case, the idea of two proverbs is the same, but this idea is expressed by different lexical

means. Another strong vehicle is *folk music* that reflects people's lifestyles, hopes, aspirations, and expectations. One of the strongest means of folk pedagogy is *family*, which contains a natural caring and supportive environment for child development. Family initiates the growth of personal qualities and skills such as industriousness, inclination to certain types of labor activity, respect for parents and the elderly.

We also conducted a survey. The questionnaire included a series of questions and statements on folk pedagogy, multicultural education and related issues. The participants were asked to provide written responses; in some cases they were interviewed on a question-answer basis. We present some of the respondents' sample statements.

In school textbooks there is a lot of material that had been created by people in ancient times: fairy-tales, riddles, small stories, etc. Such material raises pupils' interest to learning.

Today we all understand that most of us will work in multicultural surroundings ... In Russia and in our Republic people of different nationalities live in close proximity. Every ethnic group has its own national heritage - elements of folk pedagogy.

Once I looked through a book devoted to the Chuvash ethnopedagogy ... Each nation should have such a book!

People talk and write a lot about multicultural society, multicultural thinking, and multicultural education. But it is only by learning more and more about other people's cultures and folk pedagogical traditions that we may effectively explain to pupils that we live in a multicultural and interdependent country.

During my school years I never heard about folk pedagogy as well as about multicultural education ... Now I am glad! Good topics. Interrelated too.

We have forgotten about folklore and folk pedagogy ... It is time to remember all this.

The respondents' answers (including also the above-mentioned answers) show evidence of students' becoming more sophisticated in terms of folk pedagogy and multicultural education.

The Department staff members involved the student teachers in amateur artistic activities as a framework for using folk pedagogy. Amateur artistic activities occupy pre-service teachers' leisure time in a productive fashion and tend to develop students' patriotic attitude to different ethnic cultures and, on the whole, to the motherland. Some students are members of different artistic clubs where they acquire the skills of performing *folk music*, *songs*, and *folk dances*. For example, some students specialize in folk dances. With the help of artistic clubs' instructors students learn the skills of performing different folk dances. The highest talents in dancing are manifested during dancing and singing festivals under the common name "Student Stars" annually held at the Birsk Branch of Bashkir State University. Students from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds prepare and perform on stage various folk dances and sing folk couplets being eager to show primary schools their artistic skills and organize similar festivals with pupils after the graduation. Students participating in the artistic clubs come to understand that folk music and folk dance reflect people's aspirations and innermost dreams, stand as an invaluable part of human culture. Thus, through performing Russian, Tatar, Bashkir, and Mari dances, they feel how they gradually "approach" the essence of these people's cultures, thus adding to their multicultural competence and multicultural sensitivity.

The teachers took advantage of the knowledge of ethno-psychological peculiarities of Russians,

Bashkirs, Tatars and Mari in their efforts to multiculturalize the teacher preparation process (Arutunian, Drobidzeva, & Susokolov, 1999; Kukushin & Stoliarenko, 2000; Sarakuev & Krysko, 1996). For instance, knowing that ethnic Russians may concentrate on several tasks at once, but also, when needed, can focus utterly on one task, the teaching staff involved the Russian students both in cooperative and collectivistic learning environments. As Tatar learners tend to be hard-working and have an inquiring mind, the educators provided the students of Tatar origin with problem-solving tasks. Being aware that Bashkir young people tend to possess cooperative learning styles and preferences, the Bashkir participants of the experiment were involved in small-group and cooperative learning situations. As the Mari undergraduates like volunteer questions, the faculty members infused the teaching process with challenging and brainstorming tasks while working with them.

The student teachers also took a special course “Developing the Future Primary School Teachers’ Multicultural Competence” that encompassed the topics such as “The Essence of Multicultural Education,” “Psychological Aspects of Multicultural Education,” “The Means and Factors of Folk Pedagogy,” “Multicultural Education vs. Ethnopedagogy”. Among other topics, the students found out that folk pedagogy represents a complex of intertwined ideas, notions, and viewpoints, as well as strategies and techniques of education and child development, which are often common to different ethnic groups. Since ancient times, people have had a clear understanding that all that surrounds a child has a corresponding educative impact.

Discussion

The overall results of the experiment demonstrate that the participants gained a greater understanding of the nature of folk pedagogy and how it influences the development of multicultural competence in terms of qualitative and quantitative parameters. The table below illustrates the initial and final scores obtained during the experiment. In the diagram, *N* equates with the number of participants whose multicultural competence corresponds to high, medium or low grades. In each column numerical figures are translated into percentage parameters. Table 1 indicates that since the beginning of the academic year until the end of this same academic year there has been an increase in the level of multicultural competence. The pre-service teachers also became more competent in their ability to interpret the fundamentals of their future profession and the problem they may encounter while dealing with primary school students who belong to different ethnic groups.

Table 1. *Multicultural competence of the future primary school teachers*

<i>Multicultural competence</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
		1	5
	2	6.6	8.3
Low grad	2	6.6	3.3
		6	
	8	6.6	8.3

The very idea of folk pedagogy and its relation to the development of their multicultural mastery impacted their learning in significant ways. The prospective teachers acquired knowledge on folk pedagogy and multiculturalism and began to draw more attention on the necessity to gain a deeper understanding of the human diversity surrounding them. They recognized and accepted the fact that the human world around them is diverse. The human diversity is under constant change and they should be tolerant to alien cultures and other viewpoints even though this “alien” may seem strange and unusual to them.

They created a new vision on the fact that in their future profession it would also be instrumental to use the folk pedagogical strategies, that folk pedagogical traditions are closely related to historical roots and basics of child and adolescent development, i.e. to the important phenomena such as learning style, learning preference, and child-parent relationships. A proper use of the means and factors of folk pedagogy will play an invaluable role not only in folk pedagogy, but also in classical education.

The student teachers became skilled in their ability to interact with their peers from other ethnic groups. They enhanced their knowledge about other cultures, other ways of life and learned to adequately and judiciously interpret other people’s behavior patterns, customs, folk educational traditions, and mentality. They increased their cultural sensitivity and enriched their knowledge arsenal not only about other cultures, but also reflected a more positive attitude towards their own culture and national heritage. The participants demonstrated a growing understanding of how individuals develop intercultural and multicultural sensitivity, understanding and skills, which make it possible to facilitate growth and development along this path.

They came to understand that the top and uppermost idea of multicultural education is to create all necessary conditions for all students (regardless of their ethnic, cultural, gender, and social class backgrounds) to improve academic achievement. The faculty members explained that an educator in a pluralistic environment should have a constant aspiration for widening and deepening his or her professional and multicultural mastery. After crossing a threshold of primary school, student teachers, future educators, will have to teach young girls and boys how to show a compassionate attitude toward other children in class, school milieu and elsewhere, regardless of their ethnic, linguistic, religious, social class, gender, and urban/rural backgrounds. Primary school pupils must be taught to be benevolent toward and accept individual differences existing among their peers. Such differences may include devotion to a specific subject area, attitude to arts and sports, attitude to computers and related technology, clothes, hairstyles, hobbies and other leisure pursuits.

Conclusion

The authors have attempted to portray some aspects of how to use folk pedagogy in developing future primary school teachers’ multicultural sensitivity and competence. The outcomes of our investigation also suggest that it becomes incumbent for in-service teachers to realize three tasks: how to enhance their own knowledge on folk pedagogy and enhance their multicultural competence, how to guide student teachers to develop this knowledge and skills; and at the same time, consider how to transfer all this to the schoolchildren who will be in their charge. Oftentimes young teachers will have to use the same or similar means and factors of folk pedagogy and probably similar instructional strategies that they had been taught by university teachers.

We examined only a small number of topics related to folk pedagogy and how it impacts the issues of the development of multicultural competence. If any of the ideas impels the academic community

to study and work on the issues of teacher education, then we will likely reach our primary goal. It is transparently clear that no single multicultural formula will work all the time and in all socio-cultural environments (Banks, 2001). Educators who are ignited by the ideas of folk pedagogy, multiculturalism and multicultural education should adapt their efforts to each newly emerging situation.

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