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PERSONAL DIARIES AS A TOOL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC COMPETENCES

Key words: civic competences, personal diaries, civic education

Abstract: The authors of the study make references to the problems of developing civic skills in education. The paper presents also considerations on the necessity for the holistic interpretation of 'civic competencies' and on its meaning revealed, for example, in the multiplicity/variety of knowledge areas, skills and attitudes. In the final part of the article, following author's analysis of personal diaries, a thesis on the effectiveness of skilfully run civic education is formulated.

Introduction

Any human representative of the age of globalization faces particularly daunting challenges of the democratic system, as it demands of the citizen's involvement and conscious decision-making. Democracy obliges them to participate in social life, thus to engage with these areas of activity which are related to continuous development of one's knowledge and acquisition of new skills. It also makes people commit themselves to the construction of a sense of responsibility for common good and to utilitarian actions. Fulfilment of all these obligations is aggravated by the features of contemporariness: »immediacy«, changeability or relativism (Melosik 2001, pp. 31-47), as well as the currently common phenomenon of 'privatisation of life' (Bauman 2012, p. 17) which is conducive to social alienation and excessive individualization, which, in itself, leads to egotistical care about one's comfort even when it is to the detriment of others.

What should be noticed is that the democratic system of the 21st century accepts the 'citizenship' in its broad meaning. No longer restricted by the 19th century models, it has ceased to be understood merely as belonging to the categories of the nation, state or religion; in fact, it became part of human identity – one of personality features (Melosik 1998, pp. 37-39). The construction of new forms of social participation would not be possible without a sense of humanity, a skill of effective and aggression-free co-existence in heterogeneous societies which are characterised by multi-ethnicity, multi-nationality and multilingualism. Not to be neglected are also the skills of

objective evaluation of the national past and of such identification with one's native culture and history which would be devoid of chauvinistic influences. According to Jerzy Szacki, 'the idea of civic society implies nowadays the contestation of the following dichotomy: national vs. private by encouraging citizens to participate in public life, which is not necessarily related to politics' (1996, p. 50) and involves issues important from the national perspective, but also from that of the local community, region, continent, globe.

In order to construct a modern civic society it is essential to stimulate citizens and to encourage them to '[...] the development of a collective society through voluntary cooperation of individuals' (Dróźka 2013, p. 185), which is not possible without efforts made by actors at the level of education. First and foremost, civic education should be called to attention; it is to rely on the principles of lifelong learning and egalitarianism, to include the axiological and pragmatic aspects, and to tap into unconventional methods and texts.

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Civic competences

The term 'competency' has become an integral part of the educational discourse, where it is used '[...] to denote individual's habitual inclinations learnt throughout one's life' (Czerepaniak-Walczak 1999, p. 134). When debating the matters related to competencies, educationists tend to concentrate on the processes of competency learning/teaching. They notice that it is impossible to master competencies theoretically only, because the term implies a whole host of psycho-physical qualities, such as: knowledge, abilities, experiences, skills, ambitions, motivation, values, considerations, attitudes and behavioural styles which simultaneously determine individual differences in the mastership of competencies (Męczkowska 2003, pp 693-696). What characterises competencies is contextuality, dynamism and subjectivity, as a competency is always ascribed to 'someone', i.e. a person or a group of individuals, and its development facilitates, e.g. action learning, biographical learning, out-of-school learning and learning which exploits external and internal factors (Skrzypczak 1998, p. 21).

Both the concept of competency and its particularization – civic competencies – include an array of elements relating not only to a person but also to his or her existence in the world, therefore its interpretation and comprehension require a holistic approach taking into account various scientific

perspectives as well as the diversity and changeability of contexts of their development and application, which raises some natural interpretative difficulties (Solarczyk-Szwec 2013, p. 5). Considering the fact that civic competencies may be understood as '[...] cognitive and normative readiness to act for common good' (Przyszczykowski 1999, p. 122), no way can they be unambiguously classified, even within the scope of a single criterion. They can be grouped under adaptation skills, which enable productive and effective existence, entrepreneurship and communicativeness. They can also be associated with emancipation skills, which help make sense of civic realities, make decisions and act in complete awareness of the consequences of these decisions (e.g. awareness of social roles, readiness to act in the interests of public). Finally, they can be seen as evaluative skills enabling the perception of reasons lying behind one's actions and social practices and the comprehension of one's situation and of a variety of backgrounds of creative, independent and ethical activities (Czerepaniak-Walczak 1994, pp. 64-65).

The immanent characteristics of competencies, in particular their dynamism, contextuality and adaptability, render it impossible to arrive at a universal set of civic competencies. Put simply, different environments will call for work on similar civic attitudes; however, other competencies will be needed, for example, in the village and in the city. For M. Silmat, following Remy and Turneremdo, a set of civic competencies includes: acquisition and use of knowledge; assessment of one's engagement; decision making; ability to define one's goals and objectives in different situations; effective communication; cooperation skills; and publicity skills used for the benefit of oneself or one's group (1997, p. 96). On the other hand, J. C. Almack mentions: ideals and habits related to moral practices both of a group and of individuals; familiarity with the functions and structure of cooperation undertaken for the sake of common goal and common good; awareness of being responsible for oneself and groups where one belongs; awareness of advantages associated with group membership; constant readiness to enrich group's assets, which entails also the eradication of the evil and errors; ability to articulate one's needs and the needs of a group whose members are bound by reciprocal obligations (Przyszczykowski 1999, p. 123).

Irrespective of the diversity of the established sets of civic competencies, what becomes noticeable is that the creators of those sets seek to achieve a common goal: providing an individual with a range of attitudes, knowledge and skills indispensable for proper and effective existence in the democratic system (Cylkowska-Nowak 1998, p. 161), which – being dynamic and heterogeneous – presents an individual with serious challenges. Yet another goal consists in preparing an individual for an active participation in the civic life, which is to be based on thoughtfulness, cooperation, responsibility and tolerance. From each of the perspectives mentioned-above, civic competencies reveal themselves when a citizen expresses interest in and undertakes actions

aiming at solving problems afflicting society at local, regional, national, European and global levels. They are associated with the skills to acquire reliable and objective facts in the world where meanings have become devaluated due to the overload and ubiquity of information.

The main benefit of a lack of a single canon of civic competencies – a canon which would be considered the one and only – to be used in civic education is that room for analyses and afterthoughts has been reserved for an educational process developer. Such a person may freely tap into already established theories, however, bearing in mind that students' interests and the context of their everyday life are of primary importance. As a result, the civic education, interpreted as the development of civic competencies, has a universal dimension. Indeed, it should be a venture for lifetime.

From personal diaries to civic competences

Following the study of relevant texts and with the benefit of the educational experience gained so far, it is possible to make the thesis that the development of civic competencies is feasible owing to an educational process based on the analysis of personal diaries. Such education, for the time of its duration, enables the application of a wide choice of learning/teaching methods – be that discussions, group work or street games, to mention just a few – and facilitates the development of these competencies in the scope of: knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Diaries by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz in which he describes, among others, meeting with Ho Chi Minh of 25 July 1957: 'Yesterday was the adoption issued by Ho Chi Minh in the Primate's Palace. Hania insisted on going there because I thought he would see Gomulka. Meanwhile, Gomulka was not, and adoption is not nice. Of course, mainly for the fact that it was tight: only one room, which serves both the dining room and living room conversation. I exchanged a few words with Ho Chi Minh, but rather spoke of things trivial and emphatic, I do not like' (Iwaszkiewicz 2013, p. 150), Stefan Kisielewski (Kisielewski 2001) and many other representatives of the world of politics or culture, e.g. by Virginia Woolf (Woolf, 2011), Michał Stanisław Kossakowski (Kossakowski 2010), Witold Gombrowicz writing, for example, about the nature of history: 'Some history? Polish? [...] I look at her from a distance, like a mountain range. Shall I talk about it? But the story is – after all – watching from afar, this is it! How finally arranged themselves part? Who is the loser who wins – the country or emigration? Where Poland finally chose a place of residence – in the country, or in *the hearts of refugees*' (Gombrowicz 2013, p. 52), Jan Józef Lipski (Lipski 2010) or Marcei Stark describing emotions accompanying a participant "cleaning" / setting fire to Ghetto by the Nazis: 'Night, brightened bleeding fire, roaring crackle of flames. Monotony fire hisses, with burning coals fall beams. The dark street seen from the inside of the flames – here in flames people out

there on the street people; here the convicts, there the Germans' (Stark 2012, p. 87), as well as all others – including those written by people who did not enjoy common fame, e.g. one's ancestors, may become a starting point for the development of one's knowledge on the history and cultural heritage of the region, country, Europe and the world in general and on the standards and values maintained and cultivated at each of those levels. Studying them often means an opportunity to become familiar with historical events, trends and factors responsible for changes written in the annals, which is of great help in comprehending present realities and which is a breeding ground for cause-and-effect analyses. Thanks to these texts we are closer to historical personalities (Schülze 1996, pp. 11-30) and we have a more direct access to historical events.

What the diaries have in common, incomplete though the facts presented there may be, is an extensive background they depict. They show their authors with their thoughts in different contexts, i.e. family, local community, nation or social class. They reflect their authors' attitudes towards constantly evolving systems of values. Diaries also shed light on their authors' knowledge at the time of diary writing and on their wealth of life experience. They justify, explain, excuse and promote individual behaviour (Szulakiewicz 2013, p. 67). Finally, they provide information both on personal/individual mechanisms, on the one hand, and on social systems which a particular person lives in and creates (Kędzierska 2012, p. 125). From the educational point of view, it is also essential that diaries are sources of auto-perception and depiction of historical events, people, institutions or objects. The texts constitute private statements on the authors themselves, other individuals and events. As such, the subjective style is their intrinsic and obvious quality; the emotions and sincere reports lay the groundwork for and provide conditions of 'genuine' verbalization of thoughts. These characteristics of diaries may make the participants of the educational process pivoting on diary analysis more attentive to the necessity for verification of the information inferred. Moreover, they create opportunities for furnishing the participants with the skill to distinguish between facts and opinions – an indispensable skill for evaluative interpretation of ubiquitous media messages, namely: the interpretation which accounts for different interest groups and systems of values cherished by those groups. By the way, they occasion a dialogue with the Other, in the broad sense of the word; a sense of familiarity with heterogeneity in the world; expressions of respect for values held dear by others; and general understanding and acknowledgment of differences between various religious and ethnic sets of ideals.

Developing civic competencies basing on the analysis of personal diaries, with the support of various methods of active learning/teaching, facilitates civic education which '[...] instead of setting aside the values important for the nation and the state could rather put them in the context [...] of global cultural trends' (Melosik 1998, p. 65). Autobiographical statements included in diaries reveal both individual perception of events and experience shared by generations.

What emerges is a specific point of view, knowledge which may make not only the past but also the present and the future (by means of contextualisation) more comprehensible (Labocha 2000, pp. 89-95).

Conclusion

In today's world characterised by information overload personal diaries are tokens of remembrance enabling contacts with the past and contemplative socializing with ancestors. An in-depth analysis and multifaceted interpretation of personal diaries provide an impulse for the construction and implementation of educational processes concentrating on individual and collective artefacts whose significance undergoes constant reviews. There is also an opportunity to look at the contemporariness from another perspective, to evaluate a particular person's engagement with current affairs. Such an approach proves that the narration is a form of cognition, because it helps an individual find associations between different aspects of life and experiences from various periods of life (Grzegorek 2003). Skilful exploitation of personal diary contents in education may, in consequence, furnish the consumption-driven generations with socially benevolent attitudes and commence or promote democracy learning/teaching for the sake of democracy.

Translation: CONVERSA Translation Office

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Dzienniki osobiste jako narzędzie konstruowania kompetencji obywatelskich

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencje obywatelskie, dzienniki osobiste, edukacja obywatelska

Streszczenie: W tekście odniesiono się do problematyki konstruowania kompetencji obywatelskich w procesie edukacyjnym. Ustosunkowano się do konieczności holistycznego rozumienia pojęcia „kompetencje obywatelskie” i ukazano jego zawartość wyrażającą się m.in. w wielości/różnorodności obszarów wiedzy, umiejętności i postaw. W końcowej części artykułu sformułowano tezę o efektywności umiejętnie prowadzonej edukacji obywatelskiej bazującej na analizie dzienników osobistych.

Tagebücher als Instrument zur Entwicklung von Bürgerkompetenz

Schlüsselwörter: politische Kompetenz, politische Bildung, Tagebücher

Zusammenfassung: Im Text wurde zur Frage der Gestaltung von bürgerlichen Kompetenzen im Bildungsprozess Stellung genommen. Man äußerte sich auch zur Notwendigkeit, den Begriff „bürgerliche Kompetenzen“ holistisch zu verstehen und man zeigte dessen Inhalt, der u.a. in Vielfalt und Verschiedenheit von Wissensgebieten, Fähigkeiten und Haltungen zum Ausdruck kommt. Am Ende des Artikels wurde eine These über die Effektivität einer sachkundig geführten, auf der Analyse der persönlichen Tagebücher basierenden Bürgerbildung formuliert.

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