CULTURAL LITERACY: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES OF SELECTING CONTENT OF TRADICIONAL CULTURAL IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Cultural literacy today is an important educational outcome in the context of individual identity, civic education and multiculturalism. It allows an individual to understand and respect themselves, their culture and the diversity of the other cultures, know the origins, and connotations.

Cultural literacy as a result of education is related to two ideas: how to live meaningfully, consciously in society and the cultural environment, how to take responsibility for cultural heritage and values and create cultural values for oneself.

Traditional celebration and rituals are an important phenomenon in traditional culture. In the rituals, society has encoded the main world scenes and patterns of human behavior that have contributed to the well-being of the collective and the individual. The attachment of a ritual to a specific point in *time* and *space* is one of the most important conditions for its existence. Eternity and infinity are too vague abstractions for the limited human imagination. In order to understand the world we live in, these abstractions are saturated with reference points, markers. To master the content of traditional celebration means to orient oneself in these spatial and temporal markers, to know the *participants* of the ritual, their roles and functions, at the same time offering to experience those aspects of the *ritual* in which the experience cannot be explained only by rational thought processes. In this article the components of the content of the traditional cultural calendar celebration from the point of view of the ritual were substantiate. Recommendations for the implementation of traditional culture content in primary education are offered.

Keywords: *cultural literacy, education, traditional celebration, ritual, components of traditional culture learning content*

Introduction

Culture is a basic point of reference for people to make sense of their lives and is a driver of economic growth, prosperity and wellbeing. The goal of UNESCO's The 2030 Agenda Culture for Sustainable Development

is oriented towards sustainable development goals and provides integrate cultural heritage into education programs in order to open new ways for more culture-sensitive approaches in education (UNESCO, 2015).

Culture represents a source of identity, innovation and creativity for the individual and community; and is an important factor in building social inclusion and eradicating poverty, providing for economic growth and ownership of development processes. Recognizing, assessing and acquiring cultural heritage as a value is the foundation of a welfare society (Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia ..., 2010).

The new Latvia education curriculum is focused on developing the students's cultural literacy, including highlighting the importance of learning the traditional culture within educational process. As a significant concept of ongoing education reform in Latvia, cultural literacy seen as an instrument, that will help individual to understand and respect themselves, their culture and the diversity of other cultures (Skola2030, Regulations on State..., 2018). According to Hirsh, cultural literacy is a set of knowledge and skills necessary to understand complex situations that make up the cultural structure of people. Literacy of a culture arise over time with consistent exposure to and participation in culture (Hirsch, 1987). Cultural literacy means being able to understand and engaged with traditions, activities and history of a group of people from a given culture in different cultural spaces.

There is a link between the school student's cultural literacy and the teacher's ability to promote it. An important role is played by the teacher's ability to choose the content of the curriculum – the body of knowledge and information that teachers teach and that students are expected to learn in a given subject or content area in order to develop students' cultural literacy.

There are many valuable projects and programs in different countries aimed at cultural heritage into formal education and raising awareness about the links between traditional culture / intangible cultural heritage and education for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). For several years, in Scandinavia has had a targeted education policy to promote the sustainability of local languages and cultures. The Saami language and culture education programs is one of the good practice examples of responsible development of local traditional culture and language content in Norway and Finland education systems. The content of education in Scandinavia includes the acquisition of oral traditions and expressions, including language as a carrier of intangible cultural heritage; learning customs, rituals and holidays; acquisition of knowledge and customs related to nature and the universe; both the acquisition of traditional craft skills (Norwegian Ministry…, 2009; Szilvasi, 2016; Keskitalo, 2021). The

importance of learning cultural traditions is also emphasized in the content of Lithuanian education. As Mardosa (2018) wrote, "The focus on the creation of civic society in Lithuania did not eliminate the need for the teaching of ethnic culture in schools. The Law on the Principles of State Protection of Ethnic Culture provide for the teaching of ethnic culture at several school stages, the status of ethnic culture in the country extends the implementation of the objectives enshrined in the Concept of National School. Problems in the teaching of ethnic culture in schools are posed by an undefined and insufficiently conceptualized interpretation of culture content."

Assessing the result of Latvia's curriculum reform, it can be concluded that the content of traditional culture is still scattered across subjects, traditions, cultural heritage, history topics more emphasized in the fields of Language, Social sciences and Art. However, the acquisition of the content of traditional culture from the perspective of traditional calendar festivals is quite clearly marked in the educational documents (Regulations on State ..., 2018) marked in the educational documents (Regulations on State ..., 2018; Siliņa-Jasjukeviča, Briška, Juškevičiene, 2019).

However, there is still a lack of scientifically based explanation how to choose the components of traditional cultural content in order to better target students' cultural literacy in education.

Methodology

This is theoretical study and it aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on teaching Latvian traditional culture content in primary education by addressing the research question: what components of traditional culture content should be included in the curriculum in order to develop student's cultural literacy as a result of education?

To achieve this goal:

1. The concept *cultural literacy* was analyzed;
2. The term *traditional culture* was analyzed and components of traditional culture content from the ritual perspective were conceptualized.
3. Suggestions for the implementation of traditional culture content in teaching and learning process in primary education were provided.

Research method: monographic method, identifying, selecting and analyzing professional and scientific literature in international databases and desk research (policy planning documents).

Results and Discussion

Cultural literacy as a result of education

Every nation in the world has its own, unique worldview – culture. Culture is a set of spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional characteristics that belong to a society or social group and are passed down from generation to generation. Culture is not only art and literature, but also a way of life, a way of coexistence, a system of values, traditions and beliefs: in a narrower sense, culture is understood as a professional activity in literature, fine arts, music, dance, theater and related fields; in a broader sense, culture is a system of attitudes, ideas, meanings, symbols and values, a way of life of a group of people or a nation, a set of beliefs, traditions, practical skills; in the broadest sense – everything man-made, cultivated, transformed, which is not nature (Geertz, 1973; Rogof, 2003; Griswold, 2013; Banks, Cherry & McGee, 2015 et al.)

The development of a child outside culture is not possible (Rogoff, 2003; Parker, Webb, Wilson 2017). Culture makes a person a person, and a person understands and continues to shape culture. Culture as a whole includes external, visible, material manifestations and the inner, symbolic meaning or cultural core. Society and people who share a same culture attach a specific denotation to an object, sound, or place. Education plays a major role in transmission of culture, and at times, force the transformation of culture (Young, 2014).

Cultural literacy is one of significant outcomes of education. *Literacy* is the highest degree of mental activity, which is manifested in the process of cognition, analytical thinking directed at the essence of things, exploration of ambiguities or contradictions, deeper exploration and finding connection (Glossary of Linguistic Didactics, 2011).

In the same time there are various explanations in the scientific literature what cultural understanding is. The following terms are used to denote this phenomenon. *Cultural understanding* are used, when we talk abot the knowledge and understanding of and experiences with one's own culture as well as cultures of others that inform one's ability to navigate new experiences (Poirier, Wooldridge 2009; 2015; Parker, Webb, Wilson 2017). *Cultural awareness* describes someone's cultural awareness and their understanding of the differences between themselves and people from other countries or other backgrounds, differences in attitudes and values (Collins Dictionary, 2022). The term *cultural competence* are used, when we thought about the form of attitudes, skills, and system savviness for cross cultural situations involving individuals' flexibility and capability to properly assess and treat all people respectfully and in a suitable manner appropriate to their culture (Chrisman 2007; Robinson 2019). The term *cultural literacy*

includes all above mentioned and adds the ability to critically reflect on and, if necessary, to bring about change in one's own culture. It also embraces the ability to analyze the behaviors of dominant cultures in relation to other cultures, for instance, the impact of globalization or cross-cultural partnerships on local cultures around the world (Polistina, Leader 2009; Hirsh, Kett, Trefill 2002, 2016). It can be concluded, that the term *cultural literacy* is a more precise concept for development of understanding of culture in education, as it includes one's *holistic involvement and active cultural experience and participation.*

In new curriculum *cultural literacy* is explained as a complex phenomenon, it allows the individual to better understand oneself and one's own culture, and is essential in dealing with other cultures. It is an important point of contact for different areas of life and provides an opportunity for dialogue, despite the differences. The school student develops an understanding of the traditions, beliefs, habits, lifestyle patterns, values and expressions that characterize a society or a particular community. Cultural literacy is acquired in a number of learning areas to enable the development of a multifaceted understanding and attitude based on respect for one's own culture and the diversity of other cultures (Regulations on the..., 2018).

Analyzing content of different fields in the new curriculum, the cultural literacy is developed in the following directions:

- understanding of one's own cultural thoughts and behavior (critical reflection on one's own cultural choices, judgments, interpretations, prejudices, stereotypes, rules, desires, attitudes, etc., exploring one's own cultural identity and background);
- understanding of the direct (social and physical) cultural environment (knowledge of the cultural norms, habits, etc. of one's place of residence, understanding of how the direct social and physical environment shapes cultural thinking and behavior);
- understanding of the country and history (exploring one's cultural roots and identity, understanding of festive events, cultural traditions, customs, heritage and history). Understanding the heritage of a region or country as a unique value;
- international, intercultural understanding (ability to approach the expressions of other cultures without previous assumptions, stereotypes or disrespect, but with empathy, understanding, empathy and respect) (Regulations on the ..., 2018).

Purposefully planned and implemented traditional cultural acquisition in education includes the directions of cultural literacy listed above, if the school student's subjective feelings, emotional experiences, and the personal significance of learning are taken into account (Grossberg, 2010); if the cultural context is taken into account and its diverse communication with

others takes place (Helds, 2006); learning is linked to a student's personal cultural experience (Dewey, 1979; Griffin, Holford & Jarvis, 2003); culture is known not only as cognition but also as personal involvement, cultural experience, analysis, interpretation and evaluation (learning through culture) (Dewey, 1979; Bennett, Grossberg & Williams, 2005; Grossberg, 2010; Halupa, 2016; Briška, Kalēja-Gasparoviča, 2020).

The evaluation of meaning of traditional culture and related knowledge and practices in future education is encouraged by the UNESCO report (2021), which proposes to take stock of the prevailing view that epistles of local traditional cultures, i. e., the traditional common space of knowledge are objects of study, not real approaches to understanding and exploring the world. Moreover, report emphasizes the idea that both innovative and tradition-based practices can be promising, as both create new opportunities in our future living.

What components of traditional culture content should be emphasized in the educational process in order to develop better cultural literacy as aresult of education?

Traditional culture – Tradition – Ritual

Traditional culture is a culture that is centered on tradition – a set of ideas, rituals, habits, activities that are passed down from generation to generation in a particular community of people. However, it must be borne in mind that today traditions themselves, while serving as a basis for passing on values, are becoming volatile and changeable. With the gradual disappearance of the traditional way of life, there has been a break in the transmission of traditions from generation to generation and the school is now becoming one of the main institutions where children can learn about the intangible cultural heritage – values, cultural norms and their perceptions of the world and society.

Nowadays, the understanding of traditions has changed. If in the past tradition was considered to be the basis of events in the present, it is now assumed that the past is created by the present. Traditions do not exist as a force that develops on its own, they exist as interpretations, the content of which is formed by the view of the present (Kūle, 2005).

Many theoretical approaches to the concept of "tradition", especially in relation to ritual activities, are structured around the familiar problem of continuity and change. It is clear that some traditions remain consistent enough over time to give people a sense of continuity with what is considered a precedent. But it is equally clear that traditions change over time in structure, details, interpretation, and the like (Bell, 2009: 119). In order to interpret tradition creatively, one must be knowledgeable, educated in traditional culture and know the principles that exist in it. Creativity

based on knowledge allows you to develop ideas, improvise freely, react to situations.

Various disciplines explore cultural practices through the lens of ritual and ritual is itself, in turn, conceived of in an open way (The Study of…, 2015). Also in the theory of traditions, the ritual occupies a central place, therefore the understanding of traditional celebration rituals is important in the acquisition of traditional culture. A ritual is a set of actions based primarily on their symbolic values. The team constantly translates samples, stereotypes, it is focused on repeated messages determined by tradition or a priestly decree (Penner, 2016; Baiburin, 1993). Despite the variety of recognized methodological perspectives, there is a surprising degree of consistency in ritual descriptions. According to Bell (2009) ritual is a form of critical thinking, a node in which some opposite social or cultural forces come together. Examples include oppositions such as tradition and change, order and chaos, the individual and the group, subjectivity and objectivity, nature and culture, the real and the imagined ideal.

By learning rituals and cultural awareness, children learn not only folklore – songs, fairy tales, riddles, proverbs, but also non-verbal communication, which has its own structure and semantics. Ritual behavior is an obvious means of non-verbal communication and meaning and must be learned in practice alongside an understanding of the relationship between ritual and myth. Elements of speech in a ritual environment, referring to a belief system or mythology, together with kinesis, better reveal the meaning and significance of the ritual (Penner, 2016).

Ritual-oriented culture does not have a unified semiotic system through which information is recorded, stored, and processed as it is in written culture. The natural and cultural environment in which a person lives acquires the character of signs/meanings. All these semiotic means, together with linguistic texts, myths, kinship terms, music and other cultural phenomena, acquire a common field of meaning that forms the worldview. In a culture that focuses on repeating the same texts rather than reproducing them in modern culture, the transmission of information is not through laws (a type of modern culture) but through samples and 'quotations'. Such a culture cannot be learned with the usual logic, it can only be learned "by heart" in the same way as puzzle memories. Mnemonic means, including rhythm, sound, melody, play a key role in a culture built on remembrance and memorization (Baiburin, 1993).

A definition of rituals is that they are patterned human activities with *deep cultural meaning,* and each cultural group stipulates this distinct meaning. Cultural meanings of different ethnic groups may be quite different. We can be sure that cultural meanings are the core element of rituals. Exploration into "cultural facts" is the core of ritual study and

all anthropological fieldwork. After determining the belief systems (i. e., cultural facts) of the ethnic group through research, scholars can still do research find a meaning (Wu 2018). Often, practical activities with school students, common celebration of calendar holidays help participants of the ritual to come to an understanding the meaning of cultural processes.

Ritual and its components

In traditional culture, a person's life takes *place* on two levels – the execution of a ritual program (both individual and collective scenario) and daily life, which serves as an intermediate between rituals (experiencing the past and preparing for the next festival) (Baiburin, 1993). The ritual program is based on two-cycle rituals. Calendar rituals determine the rhythm of collective life, rituals in honor of a person's life determine the rhythm of individual life and they are always associated with change, transition, transformation.

As ritual theorist Ronald L. Grimes writes, ritual is conceptualized as factorable into constituents: *actions, actors, places, times, objects, languages, and groups*. If one thinks of the whole statically, together these constitute ritual "structures." If one imagines dynamically, they are "processes". Ritual includes paradoxical pairs of processes – empower and disempower groups, reinforce the status quo and enact transformation, make and unmake meaning, etc. (Grimes, 2013). Perhaps thanks to this phenomenon, with the help of rituals, existential crises in a person's life can be solved, as well as allowing him to discover own personal meaning.

The ritual is always tied to a certain point in *time* and *space.* In order for a person to understand the world in which he lives with his limited imagination, abstractions such as space and time are filled with markers. Calendar rituals are the following time markers. They mark a certain time of day, month, year, stage of life or the beginning of a new event. With the help of a ritual you can switch from one flow of time to another. Thus, a certain space-time orientation in which the ritual takes place marks "sacred time" and "sacred space" (Penner, 2016).

Ritual *objects or attributes* are an important component in understanding the ritual. They have several meanings – functional, symbolic, historical. They gain their power in the ritual, when a combination of person, object and action is formed, which is also the essence of the ritual. Things, objects, materiality are imbued with religious meanings (Nugteren, 2019).

There is no spectator category in the ritual, all *participants* are involved, everyone is equally responsible for what is happening. Therefore, the participants' knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the celebration, the processes and the tasks to be performed are important. There is only one specific reality in a ritual. It has no viewers. There are no roles

for the participants, but if there are any, they are the only ones possible. Consequently, there is no alternative pattern of behavior. The ritual always has an end goal, a functional direction towards it. The ritual is passed down from generation to generation through learning – learns parts, fragments (texts, songs, games, ritual attributes, food, actions, etc.). By repeating the ritual from year to year, the structures of thoughts, behaviors and organizations disorganized over time are restored, preserved and supplemented. The immutability of the world model, the paradigm of meaning, is being tested (Baiburin, 1993). Therefore, it would be important to experience the traditional celebration in every primary school class, filling their content with new, deeper knowledge and skills from year to year.

Traditional culture and modern culture

Today, as social, economic, and political conditions change, so do rituals, and their transformation involves the reconceptualization of space and time (Tong, Kong, 2000). Holidays from the traditional rural environment and calendar have now moved to the city and are celebrated in schools with classmates, teachers and parents, often at a time that suits everyone. In traditional schools, schools are replaced by schoolmates, the hostess – the teacher and the parents of the children are often guests who have come to celebrate. Modernity requires modifications, while preserving the essence and *meaning* of rituals.

The persistence of traditional rituals and celebrations in today's world is complicated. One might think that consumer society requires that events and rituals be constantly changing. However, what we see happening and which needs explanation and understanding is very different. Even in today's and globalized world, there are traditional holidays that are preserved and valued. Some are even growing in popularity. In addition, there is a trend towards creativity based on a romanticized view of the past and the appropriation and adaptation of other cultural rituals and customs. Traditions and how we use them are at the heart of many of our contemporary events (Laing, Frost, 2015).

Modernity in the acquisition of tradition, cultural literacy requires such an aspect as an understanding of meaning. Can the meaning be understood by learning only a set of facts and information? As Baumann points, the creation of culture is not an improvisation over time, but an internal project of social heredity that competes with moments of social change. So sociums function simultaneously in different vector directions. On the one hand, traditions ensure the maintenance of qualitative certainty, on the other hand, innovation offers a qualitatively different future. Both positions compete with each other, while both are equally responsible for the future of society (Baumann, 1996).

According to Lakatos (2003), three components are important to the continuation of any tradition: its constant and enduring 'core', the 'protective belt' that surrounds and protects the core, and its variable and dynamic periphery. In traditional society, too, individual forms of behavior have existed and alternative solutions have been allowed. The plasticity of stereotypes is allowed by several conditions: differentiation of roles in the collective, different degrees of rigor in the regulation of different spheres of life, diversity in the realization of the same notions, and finally, the impossibility of two absolutely identical situations (Lakatos, 2003).

Today, the importance of communication in the sustainability of culture is emphasized. Why support an approach to teaching traditional culture from a ritual perspective? In preparation for and celebration of festivities, the individual is socialized, and the qualities (self-control, observance of collective demands, self-denial, etc.) necessary for life in society develop. The team that performs holiday rituals together is more aware of mutual togetherness, solidarity, strengthens its internal ties. Ritual as a phenomenon of traditional culture allows to get to know and experience this culture as a whole, not in fragments. Festive rituals also have an emotional, psychotherapeutic effect, the accumulated tension is removed. A common emotional mood unites the participants.

The "things" tested are not museum objects, but dynamic festivals and celebrations that continue to exist. Based on the power of historical and cultural traditions, they are manifestations of heritage that exist in three temporalities: the celebration of the past, the present, and the goal of continuing and influencing the future (Laing, Frost, 2015).

Choosing and combining the content of different school subjects can become a useful tool for developing the student's cultural literacy in traditional culture. In the process of building cultural literacy, it is important to pay attention to time, space, participants, actions, and their meaning. The student practices traditional culture: not only learns about it at school, but learns to use cultural traditions in certain every day and festive situations. The child does not study *about* language, *about* mathematics, *about* natural science, but learns these school subjects in the context of culture thus improving their cultural literacy. The content of learning becomes a means of getting to know and understand the world (nature, society and culture). The following explanations offered below include all content components important for getting to know culture in a whole. For example, the learning content of natural science and social science helps to understand the natural processes, the rhythm of the seasons and the related traditions of work and celebrations, the norms of co-operation behaviour in everyday life and celebration. The language, music and sports learning content allow to participate and express

oneself in song, dance, music, various ritual activities. The preparation of attributes: traditional room decorations, masks, wreaths, braids, dishes, becomes a result of learning the content of handicrafts and technology. By using language meaningfully in cultural context, the child learns to listen and hear, ask and answer, name, tell and recount, justify and evaluate, get to know traditions through folk songs, fairy tales, legends, beliefs, riddles etc. The learning content of the mathematics becomes an important tool if it is necessary to measure, weigh, count, calculate the attributes of the traditional celebration, calculate the number of participants, plan the duration of various activities. In a meaningful process of learning traditional cultural content, the child learns to understand that what has been done, taught and prepared is not accidental, but is useful in various episodes of the celebration. The knowledge and skills acquired in the context promote a positive attitude towards learning in general. The child perceives the traditional culture content offered by the teacher with understanding, because he sees the importance of learning it in a wider – celebration – context.

Conclusion

The research lead to folowing conclusions:
- The cultural literacy is at the heart of competence-based education.
- The cultural literacy is complex, allows for a better understanding of oneself and one's own culture, and is essential in dealing with other cultures.
- The new competence education emphasizes the acquisition of traditional culture, cultural heritage and traditions.
- Learning traditional culture from a ritual perspective is conceptualized by the following components:
  Time. When? Why?
  Space. Where are the activities carried out during the preparation and running of the traditional celebration? Why?
  Participants. Who participates? Why?
  Action. What is traditionally done? How are you dressed? What special items are prepared and used? What are you eating? What do you do, sing, play, dance, say?
  Purpose, meaning. Meaning of the actions to be performed.
- The sum of these components provides a holistic understanding of the essence of traditional culture and ensures the continuity of culture. It is recommended to pay attention to all these components in the learning about any traditional, modern or other personally significant cultural traditions in order to promote their understanding as a whole.

- In order to create an understanding of society, culture and its values (to develop cultural literacy), each field of education, the content of each school subject has its own meaning. The education becomes not only a tool of cultural learning but also the tool of cultural transmission.
- The practical activities with school students, common celebration of calendar holidays help participants of the ritual to come to an understanding the meaning of cultural processes.

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