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School Policy in Russia and The Challenges of A Multicultural Society

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Abstract

The paper analyses major importance factors of multicultural education in Russia aimed at the cultural dialogue, reviews answers of the official school policy to challenges of multiculturalism, points to a need to balance interests of the Federal Center and the regions, as an instrument to develop common Russian identity, the Russian “super-ethnos”. The ideas of ethno-cultural (ethno-pedagogy) and multicultural (poly-cultural) education, as being developed by Russian experts, the practices of international education and the threats to international dialogue in the Russian-society education are presented also.

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1. Main text

The problem of education in a spirit of intercultural and international dialogue has not lost its urgency in the post-Soviet Russia. It is de facto aggravated by the following four important circumstances. First, by crisis of the ideas of the socialist international education. Second, by socio-demographic changes owing to the influx of refugees and immigrants from the former Soviet republics. Third, by strengthening of the processes of national and cultural self-determination of the peoples of the Russian Federation. And fourth, by presence of the negative nationalistic ideas in the society.

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School policy of the Russian Federation is impossible without taking into account the objectives of a multicultural society. This policy reflects the coexistence of many cultures, each of which is a component of the Russian civilization. At the core of the State approach is the idea that cultural commonality and diversity are the fundamentals of education and training, with Russian culture being the common binding root. The educational policy is to find an optimal balance between the Federal Center and the regions, based on the convergence of education and training, taking into account cultural values and cultural dialogue.

As an object of the school policy, Russia is multiethnic and multicultural; it is heterogeneous. It extrapolates the socio-political, cultural and ethnic characteristics of the Russian society. The school policy provides, on the one hand, self-realization of the citizens, regardless of their nationality, and, on the other hand, solves complex problems posed by the challenges of a multinational society. Multicultural and multinational character of the object (the society) and of the “actors” of education (representatives of various subcultures) creates a significant complexity in implementing the school policy as a dialogue of cultures. It becomes necessary to address the educational problems brought to life by cultural and national diversity of the society, to pursue education within a common socio-political, cultural and economic space.

The Russian school policy is understood as a set of social and educational efforts for the conservation of national languages and cultures, for the creation of a "super-ethnos" consisting of different subcultures within a federal society. Such a policy is linked to the need to ensure social justice and equal access to education within the all-Russian educational space.

To date, a framework of the educational policy based on a dialogue among cultures has been established. The legislation proclaims the policy aimed at the establishment and strengthening of a unified Russian cultural and educational space, at the formation of spiritual community of Russians, at the formation of the Russian consciousness and identity, at the development of national cultures, languages and regional cultural traditions, at the integration of individuals into national and world cultures, at breeding of the preparedness to intercultural communication, at using of the education potential to overcome ethnic tensions and social conflicts on the basis of the priority of individual rights and the equality of national cultures.

School policy is an important tool for the folding of the Russian State. This policy provides for the harmonization of the ethnic and supra-ethnic and is ultimately aimed at the creation of a multi-ethnic civil society with the adequate educational institutions.

Governmental support for the cultural and educational rights of the ethno-cultural groups is provided not only within the formal education system. The legislation provides for establishment of national and cultural associations (the autonomous regions). With support from the Government, a system of public centers to foster the culture of interethnic communication is being created.

Recent legislative and institutional measures to initiate a policy of intercultural dialogue in education have encountered serious obstacles: unequal education funding in the republics and regions, blocking of the protective measures in the field of education for a number of indigenous minorities, lack of effective tools for combining of the specific interests of national minorities and the State as a subject of the Russian majority, ethno-centric stereotypes of thinking and behavior.

The school policy of Russia is being influenced by the ideas of ethno-cultural (ethno-pedagogy) and multicultural (poly-cultural) education. The ethno-pedagogy ideas are being positioned through a interethnic dialogue (Volkov, 1999). Program of development of ethno-cultural (national) education in Moscow in 1998-2000,1999). Such an understanding makes it possible to use humanistic potential of the pedagogical tradition of the people for the development of a common Russian culture. At the same time, there is no reason to idealize the ideas of ethno-cultural education. When going with them, it is important not to get into a trap of ethno-centrism.

Russian experts are contributing to investigation of the problems of multicultural education (Balitskaya, 2008. Dzhurinskiy, 2007; Dzhurinskiy, 2008; Dzhurinskiy, 2010; Dzhurinskiy, 2013; Dzhurinskiy, 2014; Gukalenko, 2003; Suprunova, 2013). In Russia, multicultural education is being viewed as an integrative and pluralistic process with the following three main sources: Russian, national (non-Russian), and universal human. The leading role is with the Russian culture, which for the non-Russian nations and ethnic groups is a basic connection to the world spiritual values. Multicultural education then appears an effective mode of communion with the all-Russian civil, political, economic and spiritual values.

As an entry to multicultural education, it is proposed to acknowledge the students with the cultures of Russia and small ethnic groups, with the all-Russian and world cultures, and to eradicate nationalistic stereotypes. Typically, there are no specialized courses of multicultural type in schools. The corresponding topics, fostering respect for different cultures and eradication of xenophobia, are being discussed when teaching languages, history, natural science and artistic and aesthetic subjects. For example, State standards for general history at secondary school provide for teaching of the topic of Holocaust. The students learn this topic at age 15, within programs on history and literature (Treating of Holocaust and Anti-Semitism, 2006).

An experience of international education in a spirit of cultural dialogue has been accumulated in a number of international Russian schools. For example, in educational complex No. 1650 in Moscow, a project titled “Russian school in building poly-cultural education in the schools of Moscow” is being implemented. The subjects on the program are being taught in Russian, which turns to be a link bringing together the students of different nationalities and creating prerequisites for introduction of students to the Russian society and Russian culture. In addition to the main course, students study the subjects of the ethno-cycle – language, history, culture, religion, folklore and lifestyle of people of their nationality. In secondary school No. 15 of Rostov-Don the courses “Ethnic values of world religions”, the electives “Slavic mythology” and “History of Don Cossacks” have been included in the program in 2000-2003. The experiment proved to be successful. After two or three years of studies 100% of the students gave a positive answer to the question: “Are there representatives of other nationalities among your friends?”. In 1997-1998, school No. 17 in Tver has included in its civics program the course “Diversity of cultures and me” (Dzhurinskiy, 2014). Attempts are being made to implement intercultural dialogue also in national schools. These educational institutions follow a common federal standard of education in Russian and, simultaneously, ascribe students to a national (ethnic) cultural tradition through obligatory programs of the language, history and culture of one or the other people of the multinational Russia. For example, Ukrainian, Chuvash and Polish Sunday schools operate under secondary school No. 9 in the city of Ufa (Bashkortostan). The Sunday schools are also attended by students of other schools of the city. The students study the culture and language of their particular ethno-cultural group (Dzhurinskiy, 2014).

The activities on multicultural education bring certain positive outcomes. As an example, the programs of education developed in Dagestan provides for ascribing the students to a cultural dialogue. An implicit indicator of the effectiveness of this approach could be the results of a student survey carried out in Dagestan schools in 1998-1999: 59% of students from rural areas and 82.6% of students from the Makhachkala urban area have expressed their willingness to study in multinational classes (schools) (Dzhurinskiy, 2014).

Efforts towards multicultural education of Russian students do not bring, however, the desired significant positive results. Let me refer to the mentioned above student survey in Dagestan. From this survey it follows that many students are not ready to study in a multinational class (41% of the rural and 20% of the urban students) (Dzhurinskiy, 2014). Such a situation could be to some extent explained by a pressure put upon the Russian tradition of tolerance to other sub-cultures and, in particular, to immigrants. It can also be observed that skinheads and other nationalistic groups go in the streets with xenophobic slogans.

Lack of effectiveness of the policy of multicultural education to some extent stems from the fact that its concept is not flawless. The main weakness of the concept is in some utopian ideas about the prospects for the elimination of any discrepancy between civilizations and cultures through education.

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