

## Development of Learners' Democratic Culture

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**Abstract:** The study is aimed at emphasizing the importance of the selected topic as well as defining the criteria and indicators of democratic culture of a personality. The study is based on the results of a research done by a group of scholars from Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University. Teachers, parents and children from the schools of Russia and the CIS states participated in the survey conducted in the framework of the research. The results obtained allowed to identify the degree of democratic culture development and define the problems existing in the relation system of the educational process subjects. The research results also encouraged us to produce recommendations for nurturing democratic culture in schoolchildren.

**Key words:** Democratic culture, educational process, educational process subjects, interaction, self-management, cooperative creative activity

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### INTRODUCTION

The recent decade has seen the Russian state developing under the slogan of democratization of all spheres of civil life: politics, economics, arts and, no doubt, education. The majority of scholars and conspicuous statesmen claim that the future of Russia pivots on developing the culture of democratic relationship. The basic awareness of democratic culture is shaped in early childhood while school as a social institution aimed at fulfilling the tasks of children's education and upbringing has good possibilities to arrange for its further development. Recent normative documents regulating the organization of the educational process in schools and other educational institutions are clearly democracy-oriented. e.g., the section of the Federal State Education Standard for Compulsory Education "On personal results of mastering the principal educational program" contains the following characteristics: "acquisition of humanistic, democratic and traditional values of Russia's multiethnic society; fostering a sense of responsibility and duty to one's own country, formation of consciousness, benevolence and respect for other people, their opinions, worldviews, culture, language, faith, civic stance grasping the social norms, rules of conduct, roles and forms of life in social groups and communities". Article 3 of the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" entitled "Principles of national policy and legal regulation of relationship in

education sphere" highlights the following democratic values: "humanistic principles of education, priority of existence and health, human rights and freedoms as well as freedom of individual development freedom of education choice based on one's aptitudes and needs provision of everyone's right to education democratic principles of education management".

Along side setting the requirements through the normative documents, efforts are made to work out an academic definition of the school democratization problem as well as implement various approaches to practical development of democratic culture.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The concept of "democratic culture of a personality" is fairly new, however, pedagogical science already allows for several definitions thereof. Thus it seems appropriate to make a reference to S.M. Platonova's thesis research "Development of democratic culture of a learner's personality through cooperative organizational activity" where the author describes democratic culture as a "measure of an individual's social development characterizing his (her) aspiration and ability for efficient humanism-based social interaction". The level of the democratic culture of a personality is determined by a degree of development of nine structural components whose combination in its turn defines the level of the four complex personality traits included in the structure of the

democratic culture of a personality: ability for mutual understanding, tolerance, law abidance and legal activity. The researcher distinguishes the following levels of democratic culture development: “diversity of combinations which elements of a personality’s democratic culture enter into can manifest itself through the presence in the personality of a certain democratic culture type: spontaneous, passive, active, rational or harmonious.” According to S.M. Platonova, involvement of children in cooperative organizational activity together with the promotion of self-management should be treated as the main educational means of democratic culture development.

M.A. Yugova proposes a system of democratic values regulating educational activities: an individual’s inherent worth, truth, freedom and responsibility, cooperation, peace and non-violence, world culture, national values, social competence. A.V. Tararina defines the following factors which in her view affect the process of democratic culture formation for youth: external (connected with the peculiarities of social development); internal (conditioned by the specific characteristics of the educational process at a given institution of higher education) and personal (determined on the basis of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs).

In the 21st century, European and American scientists are actively being sought some practical ways to democratize education: academics and practitioners attempt to determine the characteristics of democratic school, to formulate and implement the recommendations on education for democratic culture education subjects.

American researcher Sehr (1997) develops “an ideal school model” stimulating the learners’ democratic stance. Among the basic characteristics of this model he distinguishes the following: environment of belonging to the school community, sense of security, motivation for learning, understanding the importance of education for the outside world. According to Sehr, a democratic school contraposes interest and creativity-based differentiations to those accounting for abilities, it involves children in different social practices and creates conditions for children’s real self-management.

Also, a number of foreign researchers insist on strengthening the public nature of education, support access to education for children from low-income families. In their opinion, it is necessary to level the class roots of the education system. As a positive tool to improve the educational process, they offer a “public knowledge”, the main characteristic of which is “access to education for all members of society throughout their lives” (Kelly, 1995; Soutendijk, 1989).

Also in recent years a free model of democratic education has spread in Russia and abroad. Spring (1998), the representative of this trend identifies the following factors of “the enslavement” of the education system: the glorification of the State, endorsement of the existing order and the idea of conscious subordination of all the individual and group concerns to the interests of the State. To overcome these dangers, society should reduce the school authorities in determining future policy making disciples.

A popular trend in understanding the core of the democratization of education is its correlation with the multicultural education (Mitchell and Salsbury, 1996). Another direction is focused on the transformation of the educational institutions into the engine of social change, in which teachers and students together reveal and overcome the mechanisms of oppression and domination in modern society (Apple, 1996).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Despite the theoretical recommendations some few attempts have been made to implement them in practice by particular schools. In Russia, these ideas have been implemented, for example, in “Park school” M. Balaban and in the “School of self-determination” A. Tubelsky.

This brings us to the conclusion that all studies done in this field are particularly academic and the methodological support of the process of democratic culture development under the conditions of a general comprehensive school is scant.

To sum up, the analysis of the main normative documents, scientific literature and theoretical studies devoted to the issue of democratic culture development in the context of the educational process and their comparison with the actual state of things allow to define a few problems and contradictions which exist in the modern system of education and affect the level of learners’ democratic culture:

- Creation of new documents regulating the educational process set against unpreparedness of educational institutions to implement their provisions practically
- Need for carrying out the educational process on the basis of new democratic principles and resistance shown by teachers employing “the good old” methods and approaches
- Need for democratic interaction between young learners and adults faced with the unwillingness of the latter to establish democratic relationship with children

- Aspiration of the advanced part of teachers for democracy-oriented refashioning of the “teacher learner” relationship system hampered by the absence of the appropriate methodological support

Consequently, the main objective of the given research is to experimentally test the systems of pedagogical means used in the process of learners’ democratic culture development that were discovered while analyzing the scientific literature and practices of separate educational institutions. In order to reach the above objective we focused on the accomplishment of the following tasks:

- Specify the notion of the democratic culture of a personality, elaborate on its main characteristics
- Determine the level of the learners’ democratic culture
- Carry out an integral analysis of the possibilities provided by the school curriculum for democratic culture development
- Describe the opportunities of modern education technologies for developing learners’ democratic culture, test these technologies in the classroom
- Create a bank of guidance materials for developing democratic culture outside the classroom
- Work out recommendations for organizing and developing self-management systems in village schools enabling children to participate in school decision making
- Define the form and content of interaction between educational process participants and social partners in the process of implementation of the democratic culture development program
- Determine pedagogical conditions for the development of learners’ democratic culture

We are convinced that democracy in education first of all implies granting children the right and opportunity for active and independent learning in a cooperative environment, self-supporting navigation in the information flow and finding their own pathway to the truth. “Democratic culture of a personality is a complex of personality traits defining the capability of an individual to efficiently interact in the social media basing him (her) self upon democratic values and understanding of his (her) own peculiarities” (Baiborodova and Belkina, 2013). Hence development of one’s democratic culture means stimulation of one’s independent activity on acquisition, creation, consumption and practical implementation of the norms and values of a democratic humanistic society.

**Empirical basis of the research:** In 2011-2015 a group of Yaroslavl scholars carried out experimental work targeted at determining the democratic culture level for educational process participants and establishing a system of pedagogical means designed for its development. The research was done on the basis of schools in Yaroslavl and Yaroslavl Region, Kirov, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky and Kazakhstan. The research utilized the following methods: study and analysis of historical and modern experience, modeling, survey and interview of teachers, schoolchildren and their parents, observation of activities performed by teachers and learners, creation of diagnostic situations in the educational process.

The total number of interviewees constituted 530, 86 of which were teachers and 317 parents. Two town and four village schools served venues for the experimental and development work including among other things creation of task groups made up by teachers of Yaroslavl Region working on the problem as part of the regional innovative project.

**Outline description of the research results:** With a view to the results of earlier researches and in reliance on our own studies, we have defined the criteria and some relevant indicators which allow to determine the level of democratic culture of a personality.

The Gnostic-axiological criterion implies the acknowledgement of value of socialized interests, peculiarities, rights and freedoms of all people as well as adequate perception of oneself and other people, recognition and approval of active laws and rules, understanding of importance of cooperation based on the principle of respect, need for observation of relationship standards, protection of one’s interests without infringing upon the rights of other people.

Emotional-volitional criterion accounts for an intention to master the system of various social roles as well as aspiration for the common good, harmony, collaboration, need for self-organization and sympathy. Operative-practical criterion involves one’s ability to realize and protect one’s own rights and interests as well as interests of other people, reach mutually acceptable solutions based on openness and dialogue, ability for self-management, obligation fulfillment, law abidance and tolerance.

Communicative criterion is employed to characterize one’s negotiation skills, efficiency in carrying out purposeful and contextual interaction, including the appropriate choice of interaction forms in different social situations.

The established system of criteria and indicators alongside the relevant diagnostic tools enabled to

conduct an integral study of learners' democratic culture. The results obtained have been estimated in accordance with a four-point scale (from 0-3) allowing to determine the level of development of each element of the learner's democratic culture. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results leads us to the following conclusions.

Generally, the level of the students' democratic culture can be marked as "below average". The lowest indicators pertain to the following characteristics: formedness of adequate perception of people and oneself (0.9), recognition and approval of active laws (1.0), acknowledgement of value of other people's interests (1.2), ability to defend other people's interests (0.8). In one respect such results can be explained by the children's young age and relatively short life experience. At the same time the children appear to have poor internal motivation for vigorous activity. Learners can and should participate in resolving the issues vital for the school community, however they prove reluctant to speak out, advance ideas and head their implementation, the children choose to remain in the shade rather than assume responsibility or be involved in active work. Emotional and communicative characteristics appear to achieve a higher level of development: aspiration for consent and harmony (1.6), sympathy (1.7), ability to negotiate (1.5). The children tend to share the feelings of their friends, classmates and acquaintances, express sympathy, although they do not always understand the person's state of mind observing its manifestation through physical signs. The learners display willingness to communicate with their peers however their interaction is not always conflict-free. The children also show a medium level of ability to reach mutually acceptable solutions based on openness and dialogue (1.5). The learners undoubtedly have an opportunity to hold a dialogue both in class and doing extracurricular tasks, yet they find it difficult to follow the rules of dialogue-based interaction. It should be noted that none of the children revealed any democratic culture qualities reaching a high point of development. This fact speaks for insufficient work on the formation of democratic culture values in Russian schools.

The level of a learner's democratic culture depends on a number of factors, yet still the primary role in its formation belongs to teachers and parents as immediate subjects of the educational process. The family lays the basis of the child's general culture, shapes its frame of guiding marks, provides conditions for self-esteem acquisition, all this affecting the level of the democratic culture. The teacher's personality, his (her) values, the forms, methods and techniques he (she) employs also play a significant part in the process of children's upbringing. Consequently, the study of the democratic

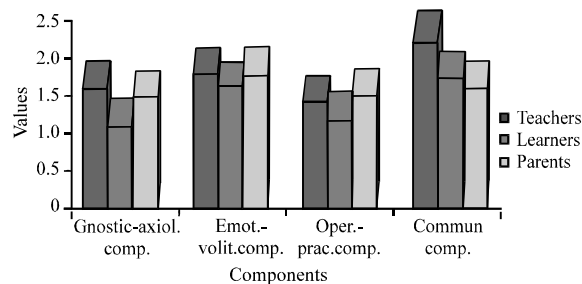


Fig. 1: Development of the basic components of democratic culture for different participants of the educational process

culture level and the analysis of factors affecting it requires taking into account the level of democratic culture development of other educational process subjects (teachers and parents).

Figure 1 presents the general findings of the research in hand where the level of the learners' democratic culture (its components) is compared with that of their parents and teachers.

A comparative analysis of the democratic culture components development characteristic of children and their teachers shows their direct correlation. Thus, teachers display insufficient formedness of adequate perception of people and themselves (1.6): they have an incomplete notion of their own strengths and weaknesses, neither are they fully aware of their capabilities. The indicator pertaining to the recognition and approval of active laws is average (1.8): the teachers admit that laws have a right to exist without delving into their subject and implementing them in practice; the teachers sometimes fail to associate real behavior with the law or rule regulating this type of behavior. The analysis of work carried out by some educational institutions allows to claim absence of concrete and targeted steps to raise the level of the teachers' legal culture as well as lack of adequate psychological and educational support or methodological guidelines providing for successful development of the learners' democratic culture. It also results in the immaturity of the Gnostic-ideological component of the democratic culture of the schoolchildren. The same dependence can be established for the development of their emotional sphere: children manifest an unstable emotional state, dependence of their feelings from external influences, inability to control their emotions. On the other hand, children's feelings are significantly impacted by adults (teachers when the children are at school). Consequently, the children share the feelings of their friends, classmates and acquaintances, tend to express sympathy, although they do not always understand the

person's state of mind observing its manifestation through physical signs. The results of our observations over the teachers inside and outside the classroom speak for a possible misunderstanding of the essence of this indicator on the teachers' part. In practice, the teachers display unwillingness and inability to pay due regard to the emotional and mental state of the children and their parents, which may result from lack of Psychological knowledge. Scant development of the "aspiration for self-management" component (1.6) indicates that the teachers are aware that they are in a position and ought to participate in resolving the issues vital for the school community, however they seem to be reluctant to speak out, suggest ideas and head their implementation, they choose to remain in the shade without taking initiative or responsibility. Besides, the results of interviews and observations allow us to assert a lack of knowledge in the questions of self-management development and its importance for nurturing democratic culture which exercises a negative influence upon the children's activity.

The learners' parents (similarly to the children and teachers) appear to have such qualities as recognition and approval of active laws and rules (1.8), need for the observation of laws and standards and obligation fulfillment (1.9), strive for consent and harmony (1.6) as the most developed. Such results probably stem from the parents' age of reason, their social status (being a mother or a father) and socially adequate behavior (primarily secured families took part in the survey). Still, these qualities are not reaching any high level and in principle correspond to the results produced by the children. The development of emotional characteristics also correlates with the children's: the parents are able to share the feelings of their children, friends and acquaintances, express their sympathy but as has been mentioned, they do not always understand the person's state of mind observing its manifestation through physical signs. The parents prove to be least capable of exercising their rights and defending their interests (1.5) which stands in direct relationship to the absence of such a quality in their children (1.2). This results in the individual's realization of just the fundamental rights whereas in the situation of their infringement he (she) appears to fail to stand upon them or carry his (her) point.

### **CONCLUSION**

To sum up, the analysis of the learners' democratic culture formedness allows us to state that the level of all the democratic culture components is relatively low. Thus, we would like to emphasize once again that the

educational institutions are taking no targeted steps to provide for the solution of this problem. The research done also leads to the conclusion that there is an instant dependence between the level of the learners' democratic culture components development and that of their parents and teachers. To improve the efficiency of measures aimed at developing the learners' democratic culture we suggest a set of educational means that were tested on the basis of schools involved in the experiment:

School teachers should actively exploit the opportunities of the educational material to help children form ideas about man's place in the surrounding world, their rights and duties, rules of constructive communication and democratic values; some educational technologies, primarily those which belong to the subject-oriented type, appear to exhibit the maximum efficiency for democratic culture development which is proved by actual practice; the experiment involved testing a number of interactive work forms employed when doing extracurricular tasks; the test results show that in terms of democratic culture acquisition the middle-school students (aged 11-14) give the best response to reflective and theatricalized games (such as "We live among people", "Ships of all flags will come to us" "This is Me", "My echo" etc.), talks with elements of a discussion ("Is it easy to be different?", "My best qualities", "I and We" etc.), participation in socially important actions ("Life is given to good causes!", "I can do it myself!" etc.). High-school students take more interest in discussions ("There is nothing perfect in the world", "Is it easy to harmonize believers and atheists") and workshops ("I live among people", "Hand in hand", "To our neighbours with love").

The analysis of historical and modern teaching experience proves the efficiency of developing learners' democratic culture through the stimulation of self-management; the use of opportunities provided by the school social environment is also effective for successful development of learners' democratic culture; this was tested within the experiment framework through organizing and holding the contest "Family of the Year", photo exhibition "Veterans' souls will stay young", actions "Kitchen garden" and "Field post office", the activity of search parties etc.

The realization of these tasks allows to achieve better educational results. The experiment conducted shows an increase in the children's educational motivation and social activity as well as bigger involvement of all educational process subjects in self-management activities.

The results of the interim stage of diagnostics point at the improvement of the ability to adequately perceive

other people and oneself on the part of all participants of the educational process (the indicator improved by 18% for the learners, by 5% for the teachers, by 4% for the parents). The learners also accomplished a higher level of tolerance and ability to defend their rights and interests (10 and 8% increase, respectively). The teachers displayed greater willingness for self-management (the average increase of this indicator equals 24%) while the parents slightly progressed in understanding the essence of laws and regulations passed collectively (a 3% increase). It is gratifying to emphasize that the schools participating in the diagnostic study witness a decrease in conflicts arising between teachers or students, both groups tending to be more interested in taking a joint decision and settling the dispute peacefully.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Learners' democratic culture must be formed using the full range of opportunities provided by the educational process and extracurricular activities. As was mentioned above, democratic culture of a personality is a phenomenon which is directly linked with the system of relations in a society or a particular community. It is a well-known fact that every type of social relations is based upon interaction. "The educational process participants interact within various systems: learner learner (peers, elder and younger students), teacher learner, teacher teacher, teacher parent, parent child (learner). It should be noted that the relationship between teachers, learners and their parents to a large extent depends on the type of relations that dominates over the teaching staff. The interaction model practiced among the teachers is projected onto all other interaction systems of the school community".

Organized communal life inside and outside the school stimulates the formation of democratic culture for all participants of the educational process. Attending school and other institutions, being in class and doing extracurricular tasks, students gain the experience of social interaction, they learn to cooperate, come to a consensus and exhibit tolerance.

Consequently, the educational means of democratic culture development should include those which encourage the development of interaction. In this connection, cooperative creative activity of the educational process participants is seen as the primary educational means. Taking this into account, the efficiency of democratic culture development increases if:

- The interacting parties have a disposition for cooperative work, understand its goals and find it meaningful

- The parties collaborate on the stages of planning, organizing and summing up the results of their activity, their roles and functions being adequately outlined
- The learners have a free choice of types and methods of activity
- The teachers' position and model of behavior facilitate the learners' self-fulfillment and self-expression
- Structurally different groups are created which stimulates development of interaction
- Dynamics of the group structures is provided with the aim of creating conditions for the children and adults' practicing various forms of communication

A special role in the process of democratic culture development should be outlined for self-management whose systems must be established at all levels: school, primary association, learners', teachers' and parents' communities.

Self-management is an efficient means as well as a certain result of democratic culture formation for participants of the educational process, a way in which a particular community organizes its living and functioning that provides the development of independence of the community members in making and implementing decisions needed for the achievement of socially significant aims.

Development of the democratic culture of a personality cannot be successful without participation in the activity of the community self-management board. The supreme power is vested in the general meeting of the community members. Its main mission is to discuss the questions of the community life, consider solutions to the problems arising in the organization of the children's activity. The result of the meeting is a context-specific decision directed at the introduction of positive changes to the work of the educational institution as well as life in general. The meeting is held when there is a necessity to negotiate a certain problem. The range of questions diverges from the problems of relationship to improvement of the living environment, labor management, particular causes. The meeting of the community members elects the core group, plans different activities, appoints activity counsels, approves of their reports, analyzes the work performance, defines strategies, discusses and adopts plans.

This stimulates the development of democracy-based relationship, formation of abilities to defend one's rights and fulfill obligations, listen to one another, ask for the floor, participate in discussions, vote for and take joint decisions, accept the will of the majority.

The educational process avails of significant opportunities for nurturing democratic culture. Unlike out-of-class activities the educational process causes the interaction of teachers and learners to be obligatory and more strictly regulated. We have defined the following aspects of democratic culture development in the educational process:

- Use of the opportunities provided by the curriculum course contents
- Development of teacher learner relationship system based on dialogue, agreement, mutual respect
- Organization of interaction between teachers, learners and parents in accordance with the principles of democratic culture using the relevant forms, methods and techniques of activity organization
- Personal example of a teacher who communicates with his colleagues, students and parents basing such interaction on the principles of democracy

The contents of the courses taken at school assist learners in their understanding of different aspects of democratic culture. A certain number of topics and sections of the course syllabuses are designed to provide a comprehensive body of knowledge about one's personality, people's relationship and social competences. e.g., the greater part of the History course is intended for planting ideas about the evolution of mankind and has a big potential for the emotional-volitional development of a personality. The discussion of questions connected with the ambiguousness of particular historical figures (Peter I, Grigory Rasputin, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin etc.) reveals a great diversity of human characters as well as determinacy of their actions by a certain historical situation.

The course of Social Science also contains topics which enable students to better understand who they are, what rights and duties they have, what standards of relations exist in their community and society as a whole. The course of Biology elucidates the physiological and mental processes of the human body, people's behavioral reactions.

Among the courses included in the school curriculum there are such that are not directly linked to the concept of democratic culture. Yet all teachers must clearly understand the opportunities given by their course, place adequate accents when teaching certain chapters, cause the interaction between the educational process participants to be based on dialogue and cooperation, encourage respect to everyone's opinion, grant the right to choose the types and methods of doing an activity etc.

The option of relevant forms, methods and techniques of activity organization will stimulate the development of such relations.

Engaging oneself in developing learners' democratic culture one should bear in mind that "family is the keynote factor of the child's social formation. It is here, in the process of the child's interaction with its parents, that it shapes its world outlook, develops its feelings, learns communicative skills" (Baiborodova and Belkina, 2014). Consequently, it is absolutely essential to raise the level of parents' pedagogical culture, prepare them for democracy-based interaction and actively involve them in cooperative activity with their child. Generally, in line with the formation of the democratic culture of all educational process participants, it seems rational to work out a system of measures that will ensure benevolent relations and create the situation of equality between teachers, children and parents. Thus, alongside the traditional Teachers' Day annually observed in Russia it would be beneficial to mark the Learners' or Parents' Day or celebrate the Day of the Family at school. It is desirable that a number of questions concerning the life of the school community, such as planning of school or class work, preparing for a particular activity, etc., be negotiated by teachers, learners and parents on equal terms.

To sum up, the necessity of steps that should be taken to stimulate the development of learners' democratic culture stems from the requirements set by the new normative documents as well as from the real need of learners and teachers to organize their interaction in a novel way, taking into account the democratic principles and equality of position of all educational process participants. The implementation of recommendations and guidelines prepared on completion of the integral research of the level of learners' democratic culture development creates conditions under which students and teachers receive the right to choose the types and forms of activity, accomplish better understanding of their own peculiarities and realize interaction taking into account their own system of values without infringing upon the rights of other people.

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