

DOES HISTORY MAKE A GOOD CITIZEN? THE ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION IN THE PROCESS OF RETHINKING THE PAST AND ITS IMPACT ON DEMOCRATIZATION (A CASE STUDY IN EASTERN EUROPE)

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Resume:

This paper will present the results of a research project that deals with the topic „Coming to Terms with the Past as a Problem of Adult Education. A case study in Eastern and Central Europe”. This project aims to define and describe the problem and phenomenon of dealing with a totalitarian past in educational institutions in contexts of social transformation after the fall of the communist regimes. It concentrates on Poland, Russia and Ukraine with respect to civic education for youths and adults. Emphasis will be laid on the connection between conceptions of the past and conceptions of democracy and civic education among educators.

Key words:

adult education, civic education, totalitarian state, culture of dialogue, shift of values, patriotic education.

Анотація:

Клоуберт Тетяна. Чи виховує історія доброго громадянина? Роль освіти дорослих у процесі переосмислення минулого та його впливу на процес демократизації (на прикладі Східної Європи).

У статті проаналізовано результати емпіричного дослідження, проведеного в Східній і Центральній Європі. Цей проект було спрямовано на визначення й вивчення проблеми переосмислення тоталітарного минулого в освітніх установах в умовах соціальної трансформації після падіння комуністичного режиму. Автор статті зосереджує увагу на Польщі, Росії та Україні й досліджує освітні проекти для молоді та дорослих. Акцентується на зв'язку між концепціями минулого й концепціями демократії та громадянської освіти, які видаються перспективними з погляду викладачів.

Ключові слова:

освіта дорослих; громадянська освіта; тоталітарне минуле; культура діалогу; патріотична освіта; переоцінка цінностей.

Аннотация:

Клоуберт Татьяна. Воспитывает ли история хорошего гражданина? Роль образования взрослых в процессе переосмысления прошлого и его влияния на процессы демократизации (на примере Восточной Европы).

В статье проанализированы результаты эмпирического исследования, проведенного в Восточной и Центральной Европе. Этот проект был направлен на определение и изучение проблемы переосмысления тоталитарного прошлого в образовательных учреждениях в условиях социальной трансформации после падения коммунистического режима. Автор статьи сосредотачивает внимание на Польше, России и Украине и исследует образовательные проекты для молодежи и взрослых. Акцентируется на связи между концепциями прошлого и концепциями демократии и гражданского образования, которые представляются перспективными с позиции преподавателей.

Ключевые слова:

образование взрослых; гражданское образование; тоталитарное прошлое; культура диалога; патриотическое образование; переоценка ценностей.

One should first ask if, for a given society, coming to terms with the past is necessary in a period of political transformation and consolidation of democracy, or if the past should be ignored in favor of making a new start.

Is the process of 'coming to terms with the past' linked with the understanding of democracy? Is this process generally necessary for the democratization of a country through civic education?

The interviews with Polish, Russian and Ukrainian adult educators, who deal with the past in their educational practice, make it clear that historical education as well as commemoration embrace not only historical facts but integrate historical awareness into the understanding of the problems of the present time. The process of dealing with the past gains a symbolic-abstract and a universalistic-ethical orientation. The topic and aim of not having to repeat the tragedies of the past is widely regarded as a challenge for education. It is through education that these tragedies should be avoided in the future. Thus, historical education and memory is not so much about practicing ritual forms of remembrance (a remembrance for the sake of remembrance), but about a reflexive examination of the past, a reflection that affects the present and the future. An education with these or similar purposes

has two motives: on the one hand to present and transmit historical knowledge (fact-based and meeting scientific standards), on the other hand to provide an ethical imperative for action. Responsibility is a key word in this kind of education: taking responsibility for the past and taking responsibility for one's own actions in the present are intertwined. The past teaches lessons that are accepted as an obligation by the generations of the present.

Thus, in the educational praxis of the institutions dealing with the past the goals are closely linked to civic education and civil society. Learning from the past is perceived as a stimulus for current action, for a current social and political engagement.

The empirically documented close connection between historical and civic education in a sense does confirm substantial educational theories. Meira Levinson, for example, advocates a reformation of history education in order to help students construct empowering civic narratives: „The way students understand the present, including the opportunities available to them, is to a significant extent shaped by their understanding of the past”. (Levinson, 2012: 109)

The question of shaping the historical narrative for the purpose of civic education in the specific

Polish, Russian and Ukrainian context will be the subject of the next part of my presentation. The guiding question will be how educators interpret the past in relationship to the perceived challenges of the present new democracy. But at first I have to give some information on the research conducted.

Data Collection and methods of the research project

Following the concept that a nation expresses and transmits its traditions and experiences through education, I have chosen the educators, the human agents of education, as respondents for my empirical research. The method of qualitative research used was that of the conversational interview with some experts of adult education. All the interviews were conducted „face-to-face” with individual respondents.

The participants in this research seldom refer to themselves as „adult educators”, but they perform the work of adult educators regardless of how they may denote it. They have worked at least four years in this domain and can share a lot of experiences from their everyday practice. The interviewees represent different types of educational institutions within both countries. The interviews were conducted in various regions of the country. In Ukraine these were: Kiev, representing the capital; Lviv, the regional capital of Western Ukraine; and Donetsk, the regional capital of Eastern Ukraine. The interviews took place in July and August 2009.

All the interviews were tape-recorded. With a few exceptions all of them have been transcribed. Each participant's responses were analyzed for frequent patterns or similarities. Once this was accomplished, all findings were compared—again looking for thematic patterns that had emerged from the responses by the participants. Themes were identified – based on the participants' responses to the interview schedule. Each response was read as a means of finding similarities and differences within the text. Once these were identified and noted, the passage was reread with the themes in mind and matched within the body of each response. All responses were then related to the appropriate themes.

Findings and discussion

The next part of the presentation discusses the results from the interviews. The guiding research question was: Does the process of coming to terms with the past depend on the understanding of democracy and providing the civic education?

I would like to begin with a quotation from an interview, which underlines as central topic concerning the process of rethinking the past against the background of the democratization:

„Of course, it is more convenient for you if you don't feel any responsibility for what happens. And this feeling was cultivated in Soviet time. The people were used to the communist party and

government taking care of them. The motto was: You should just do your job, we will take care of the rest. You don't need to think – we will do everything instead of you. We are responsible, not you. People were used to such a parasitic lifestyle. Civil society, however, requires acceptance of responsibility by all.” (Interview_U20, para 45)

The core aspect is therefore that the historical experience of living in a dictatorship should be reviewed and re-evaluated in order to build a new democracy. The new pluralistic democracy is a system that on the one hand guarantees to the citizens their rights and freedoms, but on the other hand is based on participation and involvement. One can state the thesis that after the fall of totalitarian regimes there is no building of civil society without the critical inspection of the past. The American political scientist Marc Morjé Howard (2003) states that the constitution of civil society is dependent on history and embedded in the context of history. According to Howard, the reason for the failing of civil society in Eastern Europe lies in avoiding the confrontation with the past experience of totalitarianism by the citizens. But what does it mean precisely – to review historical experience in order to be capable to participate and build a new democracy? What concrete challenges does a civic education face to?

According to the conducted interviews, the special challenges that arise from a relation between civic education and the examination of the past in Ukraine can be identified using four dimensions: the question of patriotism, the determination / redefinition of the relationship between the state and the individual, the shift of values and finally challenge of promoting the culture of dialogue.

Congruence of content : Civic education=Patriotic education?

The patriotic education is usually understood as a synonym for civic education, but with different meanings in the three countries under study. The adult educators stated that they were treating the subject of patriotism while speaking about history and its impacts on present day democracy.

Thus, from the interviews at least two types of the patriotism can be derived: a "traditional" patriotism and a „civic” patriotism. Traditional patriotism can be described as love for the country and even a sacrifice for the Fatherland. The „civic” patriotism, which many educators referred to, is understood as a service to the society and community. Patriotism is relatively clearly defined in Poland (and mostly in Ukraine) in terms of commitment to a democratic state and is therefore separated from exclusive nationalism. In Russia the patriotic education has mostly the exclusive dimension and is even in some cases connected to militarism.

Civic patriotism thus could be perceived as a part of civic education. The „traditional” understanding of patriotism impedes, however, in many cases the critical analysis of the past, which is compared in this interpretation to a „fouling of one’s own nest.” One respondent put it this way „Can one be patriotic while speaking about shameful moments of

history?” An adult educator from NGO in Russia refers to the in Russia widespread phenomenon which he calls hurrah-patriotism or „jingoism.” (Interview_R23, para 7). Upon this interviewee jingoism is focused exclusively on acclaiming of the state and on the state's glorious history.

Image 1



Image 1: Civic Education in context of the examination of the Past

It could be found out from the interviews that education of patriotic feelings on the basis of dealing with the past was the core elements of state education and the politics of history in Russia. The adult educators speak of influence, sometimes even pressure on the part of the State in dealing with the history. They feel themselves constrained to „pay attention to the positive and not the negative moments of the history[to]” in order to “shape patriotism pride for the great fatherland” (Interview_R01, para 35). The current history politics with patriotism as the core objective is aimed to „sterilize truth” while talking only about „glorious moments, achievements and heroic deeds” (ibid.). Resisting this discourse is perceived as unpatriotic.

As for civic patriotism one can observe in the interviews a strong relationship between patriotism (promoting active citizenship, participation) and democracy (as a desired form – also in comparison with a dictatorial past). An adult educator explains his educational vision:

„I would put it this way: The goal is to educate the citizens of Ukraine. [...] This goal involves several intermediate targets: the ability to reflect, to analyze, to compare, and to draw parallels between the past and the present. In the final phase we see a citizen, or, in other words, a type of personality desirable for society. [...]. His main features are: tolerance, participation, but also patriotism. Patriotism is seen in the positive sense of the word, no chauvinism, but the respect for one's own nation

and its past. Respect for a person as a representative of this nation”. (Interview_U01, para 95-97)

New relations: Individual and State

An important dimension of civic education in the context of dealing with the past refers, as can be concluded from the interviews with adult educators, to redefining the relationship between the state and the individual. In the context of the relation between the state and the individual, the aspect of humiliation and devaluation of human beings by the totalitarian state has been strongly emphasized:

„The most important for us is to return to the people the feeling of their own dignity, which the totalitarian state has taken away from them. The dignity of man is like a red thread that runs through all our events. To rethink the past means also to respect themselves and others”. (Interview_U13, para 33).

The adult educators in Russia spoke about the still existing primacy of the state over the people. In an interview, the principle of human dignity and equality was discussed as fundamental principles of democracy. The respondents argue, that in some cases the state still represents a strong power and is superior compared to a single individual. The role of the so called „little man” should be re-evaluated:

„The most terrible in the totalitarian system is a little unprotected person. At the same time there are big persons who have the power and are perverted by the power. [...] The task [of education] is that the little man learns to build a protective mechanism and that the person in power should understand that

there is a clear limit for his actions." (Interview_R03, para 48)

Many of the respondents understand civic education in the context of 'dealing with the past' as empowerment - as the ability to oppose and the capacity for civil disobedience against the power of the state.

Another aspect relates to the alienation between the state and the citizen. The previous dictatorial regime, which was perceived by critical citizens as foreign and imposed, held the citizens away from political matters. State and politics were perceived as something foreign which were to resist. Just to quote one example from the interviews with a polish adult educator:

„Many generations lived in a state where state power was imposed on the people. The unwritten rule was: Everything must be done against this state power. No one wanted to work together with the state for a common good. This setting has its consequences today. The state power, it is always „they”, but never „we”.(Interview_P22, para 135)¹., (Interview_P22, Abs. 135)

Now, the challenge for the individual is to achieve a new balance: On the one hand the individual should have the willingness and ability to support and trust the state, and on the other hand the individual has to nurture the capacity for resistance, should the state overpower the individual and move towards totalitarian tendencies.

The next aspect refers to the tension between paternalism on the part of the state and the acceptance of personal responsibility. The communist state saw itself de jure as a social state. But the paternalism was infantilization of citizens (see also Szczegóła 2003). Some interviewed adult educators see the relicts of this policy see in the passivity of the citizens and the lack of self-confidence. Therefore the personal responsibility and the primacy of personal freedom is a *conditio sine qua non* for a democratic state (see Interview_P15, para 43).

Normative Basis: shift of values – confronting the „homo sovieticus”

Many of the adult educators included in my survey emphasized the importance of a value-based discussion in the process of dealing with the past. They pointed out that the issue of the totalitarian past is inevitably connected with examining one's own judgment and assessing one's personal standards. The collapse of the Soviet Union with its powerful ideological propaganda opened the opportunity to free oneself from Soviet ways of thinking and Soviet ways of life and to discuss „new” world-views and corresponding ways of behavior:

„A change of values is a major goal of education: the settings based on old values need to be changed, and modern values for a modern Ukraine have to be formed. [...] In particular, the following attitudes need change: the attitude towards one's own environment and sphere of living, towards one's own cultural heritage, and towards oneself as a human being with dignity”. (Interview_U2, para 57)

The educational work of 'dealing with the past' implies ethical issues also of a public nature: the humanization of society (after the experience of a dictatorial system) and the constitution and self-determination of the nation. In these discussions adult educators encounter humanist and national values and the question of the distinction between these spheres, which should be thought through by making use of examples of the past. The national values include according the respondents the question of freedom: „The past illustrates the price what we have paid to be free” (Interview_P15, para 11), sums up one of the adult educators.

The difficulties of democratization and the development of civil society were and still are partly due to the political and social attitude of the population which was caused by the Soviet system with its strict regulation of the public as well as the private sphere. The adult educators observe a continuance of the so called „homo sovieticus”. The term is now used pejoratively and refers to peoples still living in the spirit of the communist past. The homo sovieticus and his ongoing influence is made responsible for deficiencies in the development of the civil society. Distinctive features of this type of mentality are, for example, a low level of trust in the community and society - on the one hand, and an unquestionable confidence in power and the state on the other hand. The interviewees state a need for a (radical) change in values through the process of dealing thoughtfully with the past. They aspire to further a new awareness of truth and of lies, a sensitization towards the many secretive issues and lies in the public sphere, a critical attitude towards media transmitted knowledge, and a sense of belonging to a state or a community.

Promoting the culture of dialogue

Civic education also implies education for life in a pluralistic society, which implies admitting and tolerating of different opinions, beliefs and conceptions. This life in pluralist world can also be seen as opposed to the state of dogmatic unambiguousness as was propagated by the earlier formal educational approaches (see Interview_U25, para 9). In his extensive investigation of the Russian „Red Terror” Jörg Baberowski (2003) pointed out that Soviet culture had been striving to be a „culture of un-ambiguity”. According to Baberowski the Soviet Union was to be transformed into a „culturally homogeneous zone” which allowed for no plurality and no differences. In almost all spheres

¹ Polish: „Oni-sm”. Cf. Fehr 2003.

of life an intensive as well as extensive attempt was made to spread a unified image of man – the image of the so-called soviet personality, formative and obligatory for the entire population. Any difference and ambivalence in the individual was repressed and fought against as a deviation from the norm (even as „sabotage”) (ibid., pp. 12ff.). Therefore it would be an important dimension of civic education and of dealing with the past to promote skills how to deal with differences, with ambiguity and ambivalences.

The interviewees also mentioned that after the collapse of the socialist camp the „new flood of opinions and points of view” led in some cases to excessive demands and overwhelming of citizens:

„The people were almost frustrated by the flood of opinions. They were not prepared to make a choice [...]. Earlier, the media were quiet, they praised in unison the party. [...] The people were not used to have the plurality of opinions [...]. Through the transformation, we have opened ourselves to the world; the world has come to us, but we were not prepared for it”. (Interview_P01, para 22)

The preparation for this should be provided through civic education while discussing, arguing, listening to other positions and justifying one's own perspectives. It is in this line of thought that several adult educators explicitly underline the goal of ‘promoting the culture of dialogue’. They deplore a general inability among people to enter into a controversial dialogue, which is regarded as an inheritance of the Soviet system.

„Even people with the same value system do not hear each other. Because they cannot. Not because they are bad, or uneducated, simply because they cannot. They could never practice it. This is a serious legacy of the Soviet Union [...]. Inability to engage in a dialogue even between like-minded people, the inability to engage in a dialogue in a community” (Interview_R34, para 19)

„You have to bring our thinking on a completely different track, a track, where, among other things,

the interests of the other person, the other side are taken into account, where the opinions of others are listened to, where one learns to truly think about the position of the other, where one grants to the other side the right to have his/her own interpretation”. (Interview_U03, para 68)

Conclusions

Summing up the results of the analysis, one can observe that confronting the past (in the context of learning for democratization) implies not only being knowledgeable about recent events, but also being well informed about the current situation, having the ability to judge on the basis of comparisons with the past, to communicate with others based on the principles of equality, and to take responsibility for one's own actions. Based on the interviews it can be concluded that education (in this case in the settings of adult learning) clearly plays a special role in supporting and promoting social change.

The function of education in the context of the individual values shift is illustrated by the metaphor of Moses:

„The task of education today is similar to the task of Moses who led people 40 years through the desert, in order that those who knew slavery die. Only a person free in his/her mind can build a new state. The education tries to shorten this 40 years and to break with persistent prejudices and herewith to break with the mental ‘Soviet Community’.” (Interview_U18, para 58)

The empirical findings can document the acute educational challenge of the topic ‘coming to terms with the past’. In all the different educational settings studied there was an understanding of the importance of emphasizing civic learning through historical learning. The topic of learning was intermeshed with a broad spectrum of themes and the agenda of adult education appeared to be intensely connected with the actual problems of society.

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doi: dx.doi.org/10.1515/1269

Material received Received 20. 11. 2015 p.

Accepted for publication 12.12.2015 p.