

ETHNO-CULTURAL EDUCATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN THE SOUTH YAKUTIA REGION OF THE SAKHA (YAKUTIA) REPUBLIC

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Abstract: The study focuses on the ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren in the educational institutions of the South Yakutia Region of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic. An analysis was made of academic and instructional literature on the conceptual framework of elementary schoolchildren's ethno-cultural education. The authors highlight the need to create a stimulating ethno-cultural educational environment directed at developing elementary schoolchildren's skills in interacting with people from other cultural backgrounds. The study aims to investigate various aspects of the ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren residing in the South Yakutia Region of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic. The study provides data from a psychological and educational experiment and demonstrates the need for an efficient organization of the teacher's professional activity aimed at providing full educational support for elementary children's ethno-cultural development. The implementation of the Planet of Friendship elective course into the multicultural educational environment improved elementary schoolchildren's knowledge system and their knowledge of the history, traditions and

culture of different peoples. The results of the final diagnostic assessment pointed to positive developments in the experimental class, including increased interest among elementary schoolchildren in learning more about both their and other cultures and history and improved positive attitudes towards people of various ethnic backgrounds and readiness for intercultural interaction.

Keywords: ethno-cultural education, elementary schoolchildren, tolerant personality.

Introduction

Socio-political changes and moral consolidation of the Russian society determine the ethno-cultural education of the young generation. At the present evolutionary stage of the multicultural society, it is extremely important and relevant for the educational system to recognize an objective need to promote ethno-cultural awareness and tolerance among schoolchildren. In this regard, the primary focus of educational work should be given to inter-ethnic relations and tolerance-oriented educational activities directed at accepting and understanding the world's ethnic and cultural diversity. In its turn, this implies the schoolchildren's understanding the uniqueness of various cultures and of ethnic traditions and beliefs through the lens of their own culture and respect for other nationalities. Efforts in this matter highlight the significance of the schoolchildren's ethno-cultural education and provides a rationale for modifying the objectives of education in the modern multicultural world. A practical solution to this issue is for the educational system to introduce schoolchildren to their national culture and that of other peoples, to set favorable psychological and pedagogical conditions designed to foster confidence and mutual tolerance as well as to sharpen the schoolchildren's cultural interaction skills and tolerance.

The issue of the schoolchildren's ethno-cultural education is most relevant in Russia's poly-ethnic regions, including the South Yakutia Region of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic. Given the relevance of the topic, the authors believe it important to touch upon the specific nature of the South Yakutia Region of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic, where major metallurgical coal enterprises in Russia's Far East are located. According to the last census, over ninety nations and nationalities live in this region. This ethnic diversity is due to the fact that the city of Neryungri, founded forty years ago, was part of the All-Russian Baikal-Amur Mainline construction project. Komsomol construction brigades, which actively participated in the city's construction, came from all over Russia and included representatives of some one hundred peoples. In such a multinational area, ethno-cultural education carries out a stabilizing mission and is regarded as a major factor behind cultural development and as a means to maintain international peace and to strengthen friendly relationships between representatives of different peoples.

To have a deeper understanding about the cultural diversity of different peoples, schoolchildren should learn to assess, analyze and systematize their knowledge of ethnic cultures and to distinguish between the general and the specific [9, p. 523]. A positive factor illustrative of growing attention to the significance of the ethno-cultural aspect of the present-day educational system is the State's focus on this issue in targeted federal programs and constituent instruments such as the Federal Law on Education of the Russian Federation, the State Educational Doctrine in the Russian Federation and the Federal State Educational Standards. As an example, the Federal Law on Education in the

Russian Federation declared the unity of Russia's cultural and educational space and the State's full support for the promotion of national cultures and regional cultural traditions [13].

Articles 28 to 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that education should promote the schoolchildren's respect for the culture, identity, language and national values of the country in which they live and, at the same time, for the world's other cultures and languages. Article 29 defines the purpose of any school as preparing the child for responsible life in modern society in a spirit of tolerance and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups as well as indigenous communities [5]. The State Educational Doctrine of the Russian Federation notes that the educational system is designed to ensure harmonious national and ethno-cultural relations and to maintain and support the ethnic and cultural uniqueness of Russia's peoples, as well as their humanistic cultural traditions [11]. The Federal State Educational Standards point out that general primary education aims to serve as a tool for building a civil, moral, intellectual and cultural society in 21st-century Russia. "One such means is by training and developing personal qualities adapted to the demands and challenges of a democratic civil society based on tolerance, cultural dialogue and respect for the multinational, poly-cultural and poly-confessional Russian society [12].

The above legal documents reduce education within the general framework of national cultures to a comprehensive perception of the national culture as a source of the individual's spiritual and moral values, to the schoolchildren's awareness of various ethnic groups' history and culture and to their ability to understand and interact with children from other cultures. Consequently, the strategy to promote ethno-cultural education among elementary children is directed at organizing specific activities and at developing and implementing into the educational system a number of Humanities electives whose aims is to shape the conceptual framework of a tolerant individual who is aware of the unity between the global and national cultures. An analysis of ethno-cultural child development programs used in pre-school and other educational institutions and creative child groups shows that the fulfilment of the above-mentioned tasks involves not only the individual's spiritual and moral development, but also the children's successful integration into a poly-ethnic society. In terms of psychological and pedagogical support, however, children's ethno-cultural development lacks psycho-diagnostic tools to determine the level of children's ethno-cultural education.

Little attention is given to the inclusion in the primary education curriculum of the national and regional components introducing the schoolchildren to the language's cultures and lifestyles of other nationalities living in the same area/region. Of special importance, at the current stage of ethno-cultural education development, is the search for new forms, methods and content techniques fostering the development of the modern individual's personality and of his or her ability to successfully adapt to a poly-ethnic environment. V. N. Gurov (2004), N. M. Lebedeva (2006), O. V. Luneva (2003), M. Yu. Martynova (2003), O. L. Romanova (1999), V. N. Pavlenko (2005), T. V. Poshtareva (2009), K. A. Strokova (2000) and T. G. Stefanenko (2006) are some of the researchers who worked on setting the theoretical framework of the schoolchildren's ethno-cultural education and investigated the individual's intercultural upbringing and ethno-cultural education in a poly-ethnic society. The key ideas relating to ethno-cultural education are present in the works of the following researchers: Ye. V. Bondareva (cultural concept of education) [1]; V. P. Borisenkova and A. Ya. Danilyuk (concept of poly-cultural educational space) [2]; G. D. Dmitriyeva (multicultural education theory) [4]; N. B. Krylova

(multicultural education) [6], among others. In examining this issue, the mentioned researchers also focus on people's national identities, internationalist convictions and more. As a whole, it is a question of integrating individuals into the global culture.

The growing popularity of ethno-cultural education based on the concept of a multi-level unity between culture and training emphasizes the need to design effective and user-friendly programs for the instruction and education of children. Today, there is a contradiction between a new awareness of the need to develop the ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren by cultivating egalitarian and equitable teacher-student relations and the lack of scientifically rigorous curricula and of teaching aids conducive to putting into practice the idea of elementary schoolchildren's ethno-cultural competence in the educational environment. The identified contradiction determined the aims and the objectives of the present research. These are as follows: to investigate various aspects of elementary schoolchildren's ethno-cultural education and to develop a psychological and teaching program directed at helping the child acquire interpersonal interaction skills in a multicultural environment, realize the specificities of his national culture and be aware of the cultural differences of people living near them.

Object of research: ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren.

Subject of research: Planet of Friendship elective course as a means to develop the ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren in the South Yakutia Region of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic.

Aim of research: to investigate various aspects of the ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren in the South Yakutia Region of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic.

Research objectives:

- 1) to analyze the psychological and pedagogical aspect of elementary schoolchildren's ethno-cultural education;
- 2) to set up and test a psychological and pedagogical program aimed at determining the level of elementary schoolchildren' ethno-cultural education;
- 3) to set up and test the Planet of Friendship course program as an extracurricular ethno-cultural educational activity for elementary schoolchildren living in the South Yakutia Region of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic.

Research hypothesis:] The ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren will be a success if comprehensive psychological and pedagogical work is carried out by using various methods, techniques and unconventional activities. Methods include cross-cultural conversations, discussions, trainings, round tables, national/communication/creative games, research projects related to the study of cultural and historical landmarks of a region or a country and more. Technics include exercises to develop empathy, artificial communication situations between people of different ethnic backgrounds, analysis of situations and opinions, sketches aimed at developing the ability to understand the emotions of another person and dialogue reflection. Unconventional forms include work on posters, contest games and quizzes about national customs, cuisine, folk arts, holding of the festival of national cultures as part of the *Me, You, Him and Her Are One Family* celebration, research tours and more.

Research novelty: The study developed and tested the Planet of Friendship elective course program as a means to foster the extracurricular ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren in the South Yakutia Region of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic.

Materials and Methods

To make an objective use of diagnostic instruments to determine the level of ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren in the designated area, an analysis was conducted of the methodological toolkits for the study of ethnic identity, in particular, the Twenty Statements Test (M. Kuhn and Th. McPartland, 1984; P. I. Gnatenko and V. N. Pavlenko, 1999) [7; 3], the Ethnic Identity Scale questionnaire (Rosental, Hrynevich, 1985) [26] and O. M. Romanova's Ethnic Identity Survey [16, p. 18]. According to Barth, Noels and Clement [20; 25], research into ethnic identity gives special attention to the analysis of the emotional and evaluative significance that the individual attaches to the ethnos to which he or she belongs and to his or her attitudes towards other ethnic communities. To identify the degree of the individual's ethnic competence, an analysis was carried out of the social distance and ethnic tolerance scale devised by E. S. Bogardus, V. N. Gurova, A. Doyle and F. E. Aboud [21; 14; 23]. Considering the elementary schoolchild's age-related and individual features, the following methods were selected from the list of the above-mentioned methods for detecting the level of elementary schoolchildren's ethno-cultural education:

1) A survey on the definition of social distance as modified by O. L. Romanova [16, p. 18]. Romanova's research into ethnic identity is directed, on one hand, at detecting the schoolchildren's awareness of their belonging to an ethnic group and of the existence of various ethnic groups and, on the other hand, at fostering cultural literacy.

2) V. N. Gurov's questionnaire designed to determine the elementary schoolchildren's ethno-cultural competence [14, p. 190].

Gurov's method includes the following major benchmarks:

- 1) Positive attitudes towards one's own and other peoples;
- 2) Interest in, knowledge of and respect for other peoples' national cultures;
- 3) Acceptance of differences between cultures and people from different cultures;
- 4) Willingness to adapt to a multinational society.

Literature Review

In popular pedagogy, an analysis of the notion of ethno-cultural education shows it to be of specific nature. It mostly reveals the transfer of one people's heritage to younger generations in terms of mutually enriching national traditions, customs, beliefs and values. Consequently, among educational tools are various ethnographic elements reflecting centuries of experience of an ethnos and echoed in its oral literature, traditions, rites, plays, inspiring examples, work, advice and well-wishing. An analysis of research and pedagogical literature will make it possible to view this notion, from the standpoint of a multiethnic society, as a combination of different cultures and ethnic groups. V. N. Gurov believes that ethno-cultural education is a major ethno-psychological determinant for primary social institutions, including livelihoods, family organization, childcare, socialization and child rearing, all of which have an impact on the development of ethnic identity [14, p. 125]. The so-called derivative institutions, such as folklore, mythology, religion and art, also take part in the shaping of ethno-cultural identity and have a special impact on the development of the individual's sphere of national concepts. In this regard, the development and shaping of elementary schoolchildren's ethno-cultural education is regarded here not only in terms of their knowledge of national games and of the revival

of their national culture, but also in terms of their introduction to the cultural diversity and of positive attitudes towards various ethno-cultural groups present in the society. Ethno-cultural diversity implies a dialogue of cultures and the ability to understand and interact with people from different cultures. Today, the conditions of life require the school system to respect the social mandate of the entire society and of its ethnic groups, i.e. to transfer to younger generations the comprehensiveness of national and other languages and cultures, their traditions, moral values and life experiences and to introduce them to global cultural values.

A. B. Pankin considers that friendliness and respect for peoples from different ethnic backgrounds are not handed down and that every generation needs to nurture them again and again, and the earlier these qualities are shaped, the more stable they will eventually become [10, p. 95]. The ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren is closely related to ethnic tolerance and ethno-cultural competence which deserve to be discussed in more details. In V. N. Gurov's view, ethnic tolerance implies a positive image of another culture while maintaining a positive perception of one's own culture [14, p. 96]. G. U. Soldatova stresses that one of the key criteria of ethnic tolerance is liberal pluralism. Researchers, such as M. M. Bakhtin, Ye. P. Belinskaya, M. N. Guboglo, A. P. Sadokhin and T. P. Stefanenko, regard tolerance, above all, as recognition of and respect for equality. Consequently, reflection on ethnic tolerance makes it possible to detect its main features: humanity, propensity for dialogue and a positive image of one's own and other ethnic cultures. In their works, V. N. Gurov (2004), O. L. Romanova (1999), K. A. Stokov (2000) and V. K. Shapovalov (1997) point out that the modern strategy on ethno-cultural education should be directed at shaping and promoting the individual's ethnic identification and national consciousness.

In discussing this issue, it is important to stress the value of forming ethnic identity. An analysis of related research literature (Barth, 1969; DeRidder, Tripathi, 1992; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, 1999, Noels, Clement, 1996; T. G. Stefanenko, 2006, etc.) [20; 22; 24; 25; 16] shows that one's perception of another culture starts with a sense of belonging to his or her ethnos based on ethno-differentiating features and with ethnic awareness including knowledge of the specific characteristics of one's own and other cultures. Given that human life is inextricably linked to interpersonal communication, interaction and mutual understanding among people, in Russia where ethnic groups with different cultural and civilizational levels live side by side, particular attention should be given to ethno-cultural competence. An analysis of research literature and of regulatory documents led to the conclusion that ethno-cultural competence is the ability and willingness to make effective use of one's knowledge as well as the awareness of cultural specificities and values of other ethnic groups when interacting with partners from other cultural backgrounds. According to O. N. Stepanova, ethno-cultural competence refers to the evolving personal quality comprising the following: basic awareness of one's ethnicity; emotional and value-based attitude towards an ethnic culture; ability to make use of one's knowledge of his or her ethnic culture; ability to perceive similarities and differences between interacting cultures in their activities; ethno-cultural tolerance; and empathy [15, p. 73].

Consequently, the notion of ethno-cultural competence is regarded here as a basis for gaining a positive experience of interethnic contacts. In its turn, the ethno-cultural education of children implies the awareness of multilingualism and interaction of many cultures in modern society, the ability to be positive about the presence of diverse cultures in a society and to be ready for mutual understanding of and interaction with

people from other cultures in a multiethnic environment. Basic categories of ethno-cultural education include ethno-cultural development, ethno-cultural personal development and ethno-cultural training that ensure the psychological and pedagogical support for children living in an ethno-cultural environment. Ethno-cultural development is an objective and multifunctional process based on the social and cultural development of ethnic groups as subjects of general historical development. Ethno-cultural development is closely related to personal. Ethno-cultural personal development is a process whose objectives, content and methods are directed at introducing the child to and adapting him to the general cultural world conducive to the rapprochement between diverse ethnic groups' cultures and values. Ye. N. Chenkurayeva believes that ethno-cultural personal development includes the schoolchild's introduction to his national popular culture, social norms of conduct and spiritual values as well as his familiarization with cultural achievements of other peoples in order to develop the child's interest in popular culture and to foster his friendly attitude towards peoples from different cultures [17, p. 8].

Therefore, ethno-cultural personal development is a first step in shaping the child's respectful attitude to the cultures of all ethnic groups, based on the recognition of other lifestyles, kindness, patience and openness to other people. One of major components of ethno-cultural education is training. An analysis of methodological literature leads to the conclusion that ethno-cultural training implies the use of various forms, methods and state-of-the-art technologies during the educational process, which introduce the child not only to the cultures and traditions of the peoples residing in the same area but also to world culture. In summary, the aim of the ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren is to involve all educational structures to develop the schoolchild's cultural sensitivity and awareness of the universal nature of basic human values and norms and to prepare him to interact openly and positively in multicultural environments. Thus, the research on the theoretical framework of the ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren found that ethno-cultural education is a way of introducing children and youth to the diverse cultures of our multiethnic world and of developing tolerance and mutual understanding by acquiring ethno- and multicultural values.

Results

Students from two classes (control Grade 2V and test Grade 2B) attending the general education school No. 1 in the town of Neryungri (Sakha Republic/Yakutia) were selected for the experiment. The test class has 25 children (1 Bashkir, 1 Tatar, 4 Ukrainians, 1 Even and 18 Russians), and the control class has 28 children (1 Yakut, 3 Tatars, 5 Ukrainians and 19 Russians). All of these schoolchildren participated in the survey developed by O. L. Romanova. When answering the question "What nationalities do you know", 7 children (28%) in the test class named 2 nationalities, 10 children (40%) and 8 children (32%) names three or more nationalities respectively. In the control class, 5 children (17.8%) named two nationalities, 12 respondents and 11 respondents (39.3%) named three or more nationalities respectively. Figure 1 shows the surveyed schoolchildren's knowledge about different nationalities.

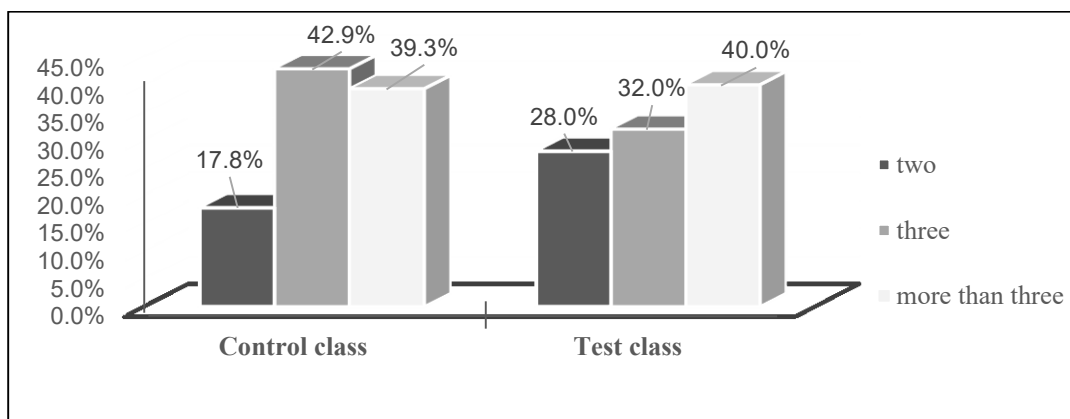


Fig. 1. Knowledge of nationalities

7 children (28%) in the test class distinguish nationalities by language and 8 respondents (32%) by appearance. 10 children (40%) said they see differences in both the appearance and the language. 6 children (21.4%) in the control class distinguish nationalities by language and 9 respondents (32.2%) see differences in the appearance, while 13 children (46.4%) mentioned both the language and the appearance. Figure 2 shows the schoolchildren's knowledge of differences between nationalities.

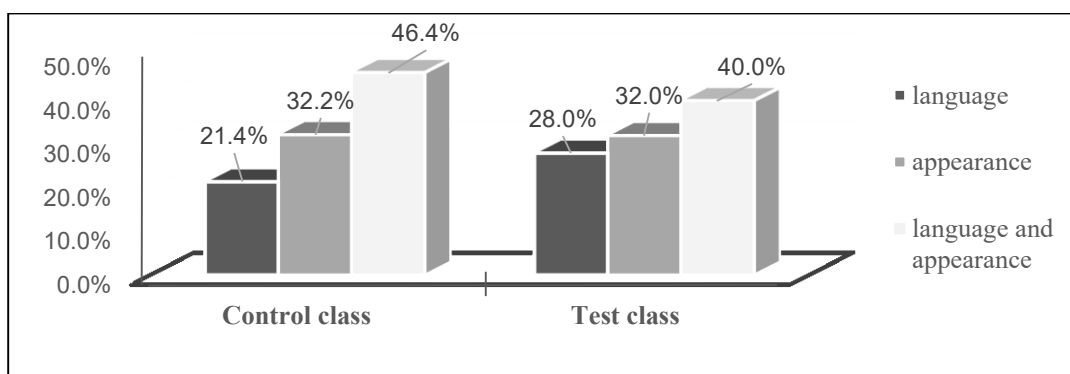


Fig. 2. Differences between nationalities

Children from both classes have difficulty answering the question "What is your nationality?", which is due to a large number of mixed marriages and to little knowledge about ethnic groups. 8 children (32%) in the test class and 6 children (21.4%) in the control class know neither their nationality nor that of their parents. When asked "How did you find you that there are people of different nationalities?", 8 children (32%) in the test class pointed to their school and kindergarten, 4 respondents (16%) to the mass media, while 5 children (20%) said they had learned that from their communication with people of different national backgrounds. 10 children (35.7%) and 6 children (21.4%) in the control class pointed to their school/kindergarten and the mass media respectively, while 5 respondents (17.8%) said they had learned that from their communication with people of different national backgrounds. 18 respondents (72%) in the test class know exactly the name of the republic in which they live, 5 children (20%) and 2 children (8%) said they lived in Russia and Neryungri respectively. In the control class, 20 children (71.4%) mentioned the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), while 7 respondents (25%) and 1 respondent (4%) said they lived in Russia and Neryungri respectively. When asked which

nationality they would choose if offered, 11 children (44%) in the test class chose representatives of civilized countries (English, German, Chinese, French), 8 children (32%) would stick to their nationality and 6 children (24%) provided no answer. In the control class, 10 children (35.7%) chose representatives of civilized countries, as many students would choose their real nationality and 8 children (28.6%) provided no answer. Figure 3 shows the above-mentioned research findings.

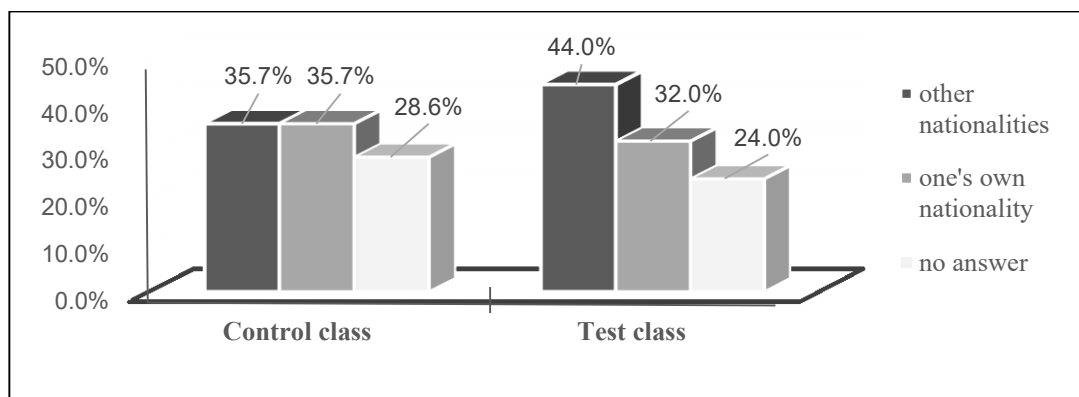


Fig. 3. Choice of nationality

A study of the final stage of the research according to Romanova's survey showed that the test Grade 2B students have an underdeveloped ethnic identity. Many children have little knowledge about other ethnic groups and about characteristic features of their own and other ethnic groups. In this regard, elementary schoolchildren should be given more objective and full information about the cultural diversity of different peoples using the example of their own region. Schoolchildren should learn to reflect upon, analyze and systematize their knowledge about ethnic cultures and to distinguish between the general and the specific. The authors used the questionnaire developed by V. N. Gurov.

First, children were offered to express their views on ethnic diversity. 10 respondents (40%) in the experimental class considered it to be normal, 6 respondents (24%) liked it that all people are different and 4 children (16%) said that ethnic diversity did not irritate them. 3 respondents (12%) stated that this concerned them in no way and 2 children (8%) said that other nationalities irritated them. 12 respondents (42.8%) in the test class thought it to be normal, 7 respondents (25%) likes it that all people are different and 5 respondents (17.8%) said that ethnic diversity did not irritate them. 3 children (10.7%) stated that this concerned them in no way and 1 child (4%) said that other nationalities irritated them. Most children have a positive attitude towards other nationalities, which can be explained by the fact that these children grew in the multinational town of Neryungri and, consequently, are comfortable with their diverse and multicultural environment. 13 children (52%) in the test class would be interested in learning more about other cultures, 7 children (28%) were unsure and 5 respondents (20%) showed no interest in this. 15 children (53.5%) in the control class would be interested in learning more about other cultures, 7 children (25%) were unsure and 6 respondents (21.5%) showed no interest in this. This suggests that the children know little about other cultures but are willing to learn more about them. Figure 4 shows the research findings.

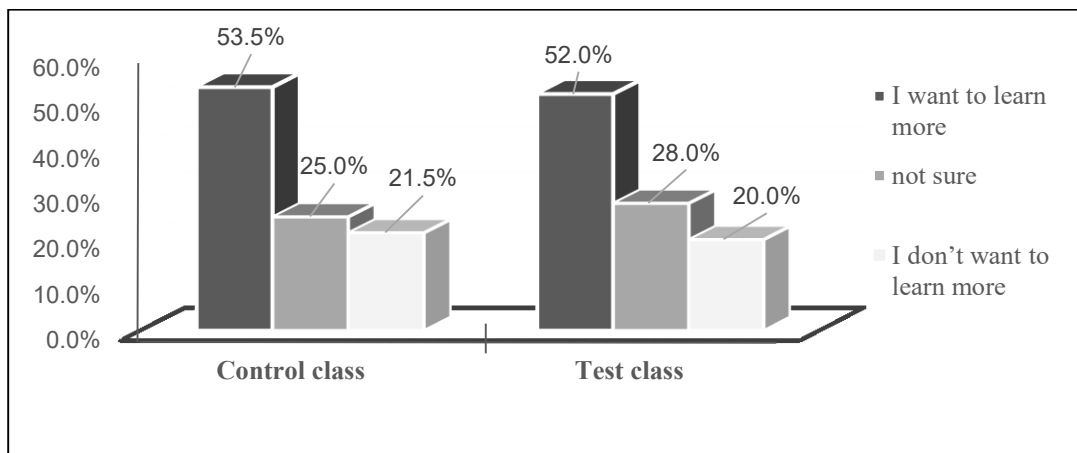


Fig. 4. Desire to learn more about other cultures

At the same time, when asked “Do you know your national culture?”, 4 children (16%) in the test class said they knew it well, 8 children (32%) said they were partially acquainted with it, 10 children (40%) said they knew little about it and 3 children (12%) knew nothing about it. 5 children (17.8%) in the control class said they know it well, 10 children (35.7%) said they were partially acquainted with it, 11 children (39.3%) said they knew little about it and 2 children (7.1%) knew nothing about it. When asked about whether they observe or not their national traditions, 4 children (16%) in the test class said they always observe them, 5 children (20%) and 11 children (44%) said they observe them sometimes and very rarely respectively, and 5 children (20%) do not observe them at all. 6 children (21.4%) in the control class answered they always observe them, 7 respondents (25%) and 10 respondents (35.7%) said they observe them sometimes and very rarely respectively, and 5 children (17.9%) do not observe them at all. Figure 5 shows the research findings.

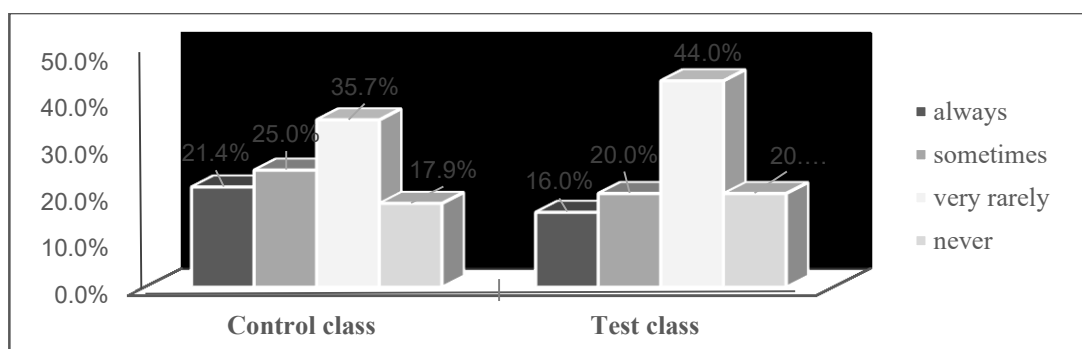


Fig. 5. Observance of traditions and customs

It should be stressed that the children have little knowledge about their national traditions and customs due to gaps in home education and in class teachers’ work with children’s parents concerning national traditions. When asked “Would you like to learn more about your national culture?”, 12 respondents (48%) in the test class answered “yes”, 10 children (40%) showed no interest and 3 children (12%) were not willing to learn more about their culture. 3 respondents (46.4%) in the control class said they were interested, 12 children (42.8%) showed no interest and 3 children (10.7%) were not

willing to learn more about their culture. This suggests that the children know little about their national culture but are willing to learn more about it. 10 respondents (40%) in the test class felt quietly confident about their belonging to their nation, 5 children (20%) felt proud of it and 4 respondents (16%) were indifferent. This fact shows that the children take their nationality for granted. Unfortunately, 2 children (8%) felt resentful about their nation and 4 children (16%) were unsure. 7 children (25%) and 12 children (42.9%) in the control class felt proud and confident respectively; 4 children (14.3%) were indifferent. 1 child (4%) felt resentful about their nation and 5 respondents (17.8%) were unsure. It is encouraging that most respondents are proud of and happy with their belonging to their nation (Fig. 6).

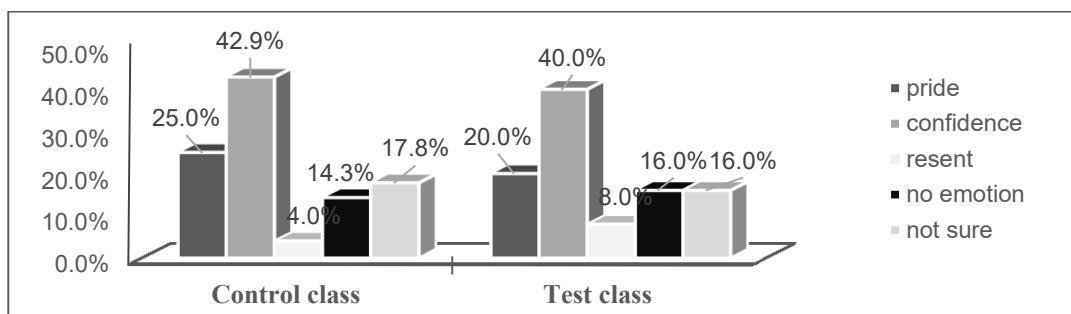


Fig. 6. Children's attitude towards their nation

Furthermore, the present research showed that children reacted to conflicts emotionally rather than rationally. As an example, 8 respondents (32%) in the test class said that they would fight back if the adverse party behaved aggressively; 6 children (24%) said they would try settling their differences peacefully. The same number of children said they would try avoiding conflict and 6 children (24%) said they would pretend that nothing serious has happened. 8 respondents (28.6%) in the control class states that they would fight back if the adverse party behaved aggressively and 7 children (25%) said they would try settling their differences peacefully. 10 children (35.7%) said they would try avoiding conflict and 3 respondents (10.7%) said they would pretend that nothing serious has happened. Given the above, children should be taught to analyze situations and know alternative ways of resolving conflicts, which is of great importance for developing their tolerance for, openness to and confidence in other people as well as their readiness for building mutual understanding with their peers in a multiethnic society. The initial diagnostic results served as a basis for establishing an ethno-cultural elective course program aimed at preserving elementary schoolchildren's socio-cultural identity at promoting confidence, mutual tolerance and positive interaction skills for better communication with people of other cultural backgrounds.

Discussion

It should be stressed that humanistic psychologists such as Abraham Maslow, Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers [8; 18; 19] highlight the individual's spiritual origin. The main features of this concept are as follows: each person has a huge potential for self-development; the person's potential for self-development is unique; the person's behavior is not identical to his essence because behavior is just one of the psyche's functions. The subjectivity and psyche of human understanding is such that the person

builds his relation with other people based on his knowledge, skills and personal experience realized in this person's axiological, emotional and sensual inner space. Therefore, the meaning of human life is for every individual to fully reveal his spiritual potential and to acquire skills in transforming himself positively in the modern multiethnic world. Specifically, the development of contemporary multiethnic society requires a broad discussion of tolerance and increases the importance of the child's education directed at grasping the diversity of the multiethnic world and at developing his international communication skills. New approaches to the schoolchildren's ethno-cultural education are based not only on providing the children with knowledge about the history and culture of various peoples and about social conventions in a multinational environment, but also on using new techniques and methods ensuring a positive dialogue of culture and on providing mechanisms for promoting tolerance.

Our analysis of the pedagogical experience of elementary school teacher in the Russian Federation and, specifically, in the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic led to the conclusion that ethno-cultural educational programs can be implemented both in the classroom and in extracurricular activities by means of didactic games, popular teaching methods, information technologies, presentations, discussions, conversations, problem-based questions and comparison. Educational programs can also be implemented through active interaction between learners from different ethnic groups and interactive reflection. In our view, introduction of ethno-cultural education at the regional level means the creation of the educational and training system based on cultural pluralism and on experience of considering schoolchildren's national and psychological aspects in teaching multinational classes along with the introduction of the multiethnic society's cultural values into educational programs. To gradually provide children with knowledge about diverse ethnic cultures and to expand their vision, the authors developed and tested the Planet of Friendship elective course program for Grade 2B students attending the general education school No 1 in the town of Neryungri of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic (25 classes).

To make sure that pedagogical work on the ethno-cultural education of elementary schoolchildren is effective, the authors determine the aims and content of the elective course as well as the basic methods and techniques to be adapted during class. In establishing the program, the authors considered the principles underpinning the process of the schoolchildren's ethno-cultural development such as humanization, conformity to natural laws, subjectivity, cultural conformity, integrity of the pedagogical process, tolerance, research and cooperation. Aim of the elective course: to create favorable conditions for establishing relationships when interacting with people around, which are based on mutual understanding and willingness to accept other people's views, traditions and habits as they are.

Objectives:

- 1) develop the ethno-cultural knowledge of individuals from a specific cultural background (introducing schoolchildren to the history, traditions and culture of their own and other peoples);
- 2) shape ethnic identity and promote respect for the culture, values, traditions and views of ethnic groups;
- 3) develop right attitudes and real experience in interacting positively with people of different nationalities;

4) foster friendliness and tolerance towards other cultural groups.

The elective course program is directed at the following:

- 1) Formation of joint activity groups in the classroom aimed at maintaining the region's cultural traditions and at showing respect for other cultural groups (trainings, national games, competitions and contests);
- 2) Creation of favorable conditions for cooperation, mutual understanding, willingness to accept ethnic diversity and values, self-control, emotion and behavior management;
- 3) Reflection in dialogue form (conversations, trainings, round tables, discussions, analysis of situations/opinions and more).

The following approaches are used in the program under investigation:

- 1) The personality-oriented approach views the elementary schoolchild's personality as a subject of self-education activity capable of overcoming his own stereotypes and prejudices.
- 2) The competence-based approach is aimed at the schoolchild's acquisition of relevant practical knowledge about this or that culture implemented through specific skills and behavioral models in a real-life ethnic environment.
- 3) The practice-oriented approach shapes a multicultural personality, whose attributes include knowledge of one's own and other ethnic cultures, ability to put oneself in the position of other and to take common multicultural life for granted.

Program implementation:

- 1) Formation of joint activity groups in the classroom and their interaction (games, communication activities, national games, relay races, posters, festivals, etc.).
- 2) Reflection in dialogue form (conversations, round tables, discussions, analysis of problematic situations, opinions, etc.).

The course content is based on the main didactic principles for content selection, i.e. accessibility, consistency, emotional intensity, personal interest and motivation, and includes the following ethno-cultural education components. Cognitive. Focus on multiethnic reality and common cultural past of different peoples centered around the following topics: "A Word about My Ancestry", "My Small Motherland", "Peoples in Our Region", "Russia is My Homeland", etc. These topics aim to make children feel their belonging to their social micro- and macro-environment. Emotionally-oriented. Awareness of one's ethno-cultural identity and positive attitudes towards people of diverse ethnic groups. This component comprises an ethnographic aspect, as exemplified in the following topics: "My Name's History", "We Are Different, We Are One", "Traditions in Songs, Games and Rites", "Culture of Various Peoples", etc. These classes provide information of ethnographical nature: typical national names, national costumes, national cuisine, national holidays, folk games, folk art (orality, dance and music), traditional types of dwelling and more. To develop their cognitive abilities (analysis and generalization), schoolchildren are asked to establish the dependence of different peoples' housing, clothing and activities on the climate and geography of the region, in which this or that people lives. Behavioral. Development of social abilities and behavioral skills centered round the following topics: "Let's Get Along", "Respect Yourself, Respect Others", "Ways of Resolving Conflicts", etc. The main aim of these activities is to develop children's friendly

attitudes towards each other, tolerance towards themselves and others and results-oriented interaction in conflict situations and to strengthen positive interpersonal links in a team through play (“Common Rhythm”, “Quack-Croak”, “Give Me a Pebble”, “Friendship Bridge”, “Meeting”, “Pleasant and Unpleasant”, “Relationship”, etc.). During class, teachers are encouraged to adhere to the following organizational and pedagogical guidelines:

- 1) Create a favorable psychological climate and foster teamwork among learners;
- 2) Give children the right to choose types and means of activities and/or roles;
- 3) Avoid putting pressure on learners;
- 4) Enhance confidence among participants in the educational process so that everyone could fulfil one’s potential, achieve success and, at the same time, take care of others and made a real contribution to the common cause.

The program was tested during 25-to-30-minute extracurricular school activities two times a month. These extracurricular activities introduced children to the national symbols of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic, economic activities of local peoples, oral folk art, the history of their native land, Russian and local children’s writers and poets as well as folk songs and musical instruments, costumes and main ornaments, everyday life of different peoples, local cuisine, games and toys. Introduction of elementary schoolchildren to oral traditions, heroic epics, rites, traditions and customs of diverse peoples involves the interactive game approach (competitions, contests and quizzes) and verbal methods (discussions, trainings, stories, conversations and problem situations). Furthermore, children are involved in research activities, prepare oral presentations and work on creative projects. As an example, when examining ornaments in folk costumes of the peoples of the North, children use colored paper, watercolors, gouache and colored pencils to create their own ornament samples and apply their knowledge and skills developed in their Art and Home Economics classes to decorate clothing, footwear and tableware. These activities also include the use of information technologies, since learners are offered a wide choice of creative PowerPoint assignments and projects. The main framework of the course were meetings with representatives of ethnic minorities, culture days and festivals as well as children’s teamwork in class, which includes game and communication exercises, quizzes, thematic parties, festivals, folk customs competitions, national games, relay races and activities in dialogue form (conversations, round tables, analysis of situations and opinion, etc.). The final class of the elective course entitled *Living Peacefully in the World* comprised a general assessment of the course activities and a discussion of the learners’ answers to various questions such as “Would you find it interesting if the inhabitants of our planet were no different from each other in terms of physical appearance, culture, traditions or achievements?” and “Why do we have to be tolerant towards different people?”. Such discussions help children realize their difference from and their similarity to people around them, tolerance of other people’s opinions, respect for human dignity and the rights of others. During class, learners are divided into groups and each group is given an assignment. At the end of the class, all learners contribute to the creation of the common picture (“The Planet of Goodness”), which develops the children’s imagination, creativity, unity and their ability to cooperate and interact with each other. To determine the effectiveness of the proposed method for developing the elementary schoolchildren’s ethno-cultural education, the final diagnosis was carried out at the end of the test period by using the same research methodologies.

The final diagnosis revealed a positive trend in the ethno-cultural development of the elementary schoolchildren from the test class. Thus, the number of children who were knowledgeable about their culture and adhered to their national traditions increased by 25%. The number of children who felt proud of their nationality increased by 38% and 20% of schoolchildren showed increased interest in studying other cultures. There was a 28 percent increase in the positive attitude towards other nationalities and the number of children ready to avoid conflict or to negotiate dropped by 24%. Therefore, the use of verbal, visual, game, training and problem methods used alone or in combination with excursions, reflections in dialogue form and various techniques (project on a given topic, thematic impromptus, etc.) had a favorable effect on the development of ethno-cultural education. The results were increased respect for other nationalities and better knowledge of the characteristics and traditions of one's own and other peoples. The children started to interact more successfully between themselves and became more familiar with their culture, as demonstrated by the results of the final stage of the psychological and pedagogical experiment. Thus, the research study seems to have been a success and the Planet of Friendship elective course program has contributed greatly to the achievement of its goals and objectives.

Conclusion

The findings based on the research study in the South Yakutia Region of the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic revealed that the Planet of Friendship elective course program has increased the schoolchildren's interest in and respect for other peoples and their ethno-cultural development in a multicultural environment. The program adopts various methods and techniques aimed at actively introducing children to the cultural heritage of different peoples and comprises excursions, research projects, trainings, discussions, games directed at analyzing one's own culture, interactions with diverse cultures or people of different cultural backgrounds as well as the establishment of cultural rules of the target culture. The research findings also revealed positive changes in the ethno-cultural competence of elementary schoolchildren and positive trends in the test class. The elementary schoolchildren showed increased interest in studying their own and other cultures and history and gained a considerable knowledge of peoples living in the same region while taking a more positive attitude towards people of different ethnic backgrounds and displaying greater willingness to mutual cultural enrichment.

In summary, the study confirmed the authors' hypothesis that the use of target-oriented methods and techniques in an ethno-pedagogical environment contributes to the ethno-cultural development of elementary schoolchildren by expanding their knowledge about the culture and values of different peoples and by developing their positive attitude towards people of different cultural backgrounds. The adoption of an ethno-cultural elective course program to deal with issues in ethno-national education help children realize the importance of respectful and conflict-free interaction with people of different ethnic backgrounds and facilitate their successful integration into a multiethnic environment. The analysis of the research findings confirmed the effectiveness of the proposed Planet of Friendship elective course program. To conclude, using all interpersonal communication techniques in a multicultural educational environment would promote, among schoolchildren, a spirit of peace, mutual understanding of other peoples and greater awareness of the need to maintain peace, tolerance and humanism. In our view, elementary schoolchildren's deeper insights into

the history and culture of all ethnic groups present in the region under investigation as well as their ability to understand and interact with these peoples would foster the formation of a supra-ethnic personality.

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