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THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER'S SOCIAL COMPETENCE IN RURAL MOUNTAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract. This paper attempted to illuminate the importance of social competence for elementary school teacher in rural mountain environment. The author analyzes the essential features, social and pedagogical challenges in rural schools, sensible changes characteristic of the modern village. Special attention is paid to the rural mountain school as a center of educational and social activities, its peculiarities and factors causing them, including the effect of mountain environment, climatic conditions, administration method, traditions, etc. It's pointed out that teachers are also exposed to the effect of mountain environment. They work under tough weather conditions, often in a closed team, in the atmosphere of professional, social, economic and political information scarcity, which leads to a rapid "aging", gradual professional, social decline and social competence development recession. The author proves the need to consider the environmental impact in the design of modern school, the need for innovative processes while maintaining the national spirit and the environment; the development of social competence of elementary school teacher in constantly changing social rural mountain environment is in the focus of attention.

Keywords: rural mountain school, environmental impact, social competence.

Socio-economic changes and relevant reforms in Ukrainian education consistent with the Bologna Process require the application of the competency approach to education and training, the need to develop social competence of elementary school teachers, especially in rural mountain schools.

It should be noted that the issue of the introduction of competence-based approach has recently attracted the attention of the Ukrainian and foreign scholars focusing on the development of future teachers' social competence of different categories, experts in social work, psychologists, students getting a degree in Psychology and Pedagogy^{20;21;29}.

It should be emphasized that among the substantial amount of literature available on the subject of practice and training of the rural school teachers particularly noteworthy are the works on training students for social and educational activities in rural areas^{17;18;24}, socialization of children in rural educational systems "Comprehensive education - pre-school", the formation of social competence of elementary school children, rural students. Of special interest are the works researching the following issues:

– elementary schoolchild personality development in the mountain environment of the Ukrainian Carpathians, the specific nature effect on the professional training, education and development of mountain children¹⁹;

– the peculiarities of mountain elementary schools functioning, scientific and methodological, educational and cultural activity, studies and pedagogical work, labor and professional training, educational and social space of the mountain school¹⁰;

– psychological and pedagogical creative abilities of teachers in the mountain environment, professional training of elementary school teachers to promote their skills to work in mountains schools, their steady professional development, the ways to improve the educational process in rural mountain school^{3;9;11;30;40}.

It should be noted that the problem of mountain schools are not purely Ukrainian, the matter in question is the human civilization function, mountain people social identity, the relationship between man and nature, economy and education. These issues have been in the focus of attention of the international community, they were discussed in various scientific forums, including the Krakow conference “Central and Eastern Europe Green Ridge” (1998), 5th Conference “Environment for Europe” (Framework Convention for the Protection and Sustainable development of the Carpathians signed by seven countries in the Carpathian region such as Poland, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine and the Czech Republic, Kyiv, 2003)^{1;2;8;23;32}, the Congress of Local and Regional authorities of the European Council “Sustainable development of the Carpathians and other mountain regions in Europe” Uzhgorod, September, 2010, etc. Mountain school issues are considered in the UN International Programme “Programme for Sustainable Development in Mountain Areas”, UN conference proceedings (Rio de Janeiro) and others.

Noteworthy is the research project “Mountain School. Status. Problems. Prospects”, managed by the scholars of the Carpathian National University named after Vasyl Stefanyk (Vasyl Khrushch is the author and project director)⁶.

Unfortunately, the development of the social competence of elementary school teachers in rural mountain areas has not been in the focus of scholar’s attention.

It is well known that the rural school has a special status in the system of high-school education as a cultural center and a source of intellectual and creative enrichment with a specific village philosophy and subculture performing the main function. The primary educative force of the rural school is spiritual wealth, knowledge, erudition, teacher’s outlook²⁵. A rural teacher is constantly in the spotlight for his students and parents, he is the culture beam and an ideal of conduct, which in turn affects the attitude to the subject he teaches, and therefore his success.

The research-oriented analysis of publication^{14-16;18;38;39} enables to conclude that the specificity of the rural school is the following:

1. Proximity to nature, agricultural environment creates favorable conditions for training students to live in the countryside, to be engaged in agriculture and be independent in solving economic and life problems.

2. Following the best traditions of popular pedagogy.

3. Perfect teacher’s awareness about children character, living conditions, family relationships, relationship to peers etc.

4. Importance of public opinion, teacher’s authority.

5. Territorial integrity, common problems, concerns, interests, sharing common team-spirited workforce by most parents, constant communication outside school, close relationships, intimate forms of communication between people of different ages, professions, generations.

6. Building educational process taking into account local historical, cultural, human, moral, ethical, natural production values, customs and traditions of the environment.

7. Lack of competence and small size of most rural schools.

However, the economic, social, ethnic, demographic and geographic factors cause the following socio-pedagogical problems in rural schools:

- under-staffing, shortage of teachers on certain subjects;

- relatively low initial educational opportunities for rural students as a result of underestimating of nursery education (a small number of rural children attend nursery schools) and unfavorable learning environment in the family (computer, mutual understanding with parents etc.);

- a significant proportion of family members time is spent on their household activities;
- overwork of rural teachers at household interfering with the process of self-education, family pedagogisation;
- non-systematic schooling, as a result of seasonality and instability of agricultural activity and irregular parents requirements to children teaching;
- lack of extracurricular institutions, cultural centers in rural areas;
- inability to implement school health functions;
- restricting the ability of teacher's self-education;
- lack of methodological and academic support in the educational process;
- increased disease risk for the children who don't go to a local school and have to use transport;
- depression of culture-educational function, which negates the child's participation in extracurricular activities, complicates interaction with parents⁵. The above is confirmed by a survey of teachers in rural schools¹³.

It should also be taken into account that the significant changes that have occurred in the modern village, including the possibility of combining accommodation in the countryside with productive work in the urban area, active migration of young people from villages to cities and thus a certain reduction of the number of people, including school children, lack of finance, lack of aid from the side of agricultural enterprises and at the same time potential partners growth, emergence of new businesses (rural entrepreneurs, farmers, private farms owners) and socio-cultural entities (religious groups, new social organizations etc). Under these conditions, a rural teacher, especially in elementary school as he works with students whose age is the most sensitive, has to learn to interact with the changing environment, develop social competence in his students and himself.

It is important to note that rural mountain school besides the abovementioned has a number of specific features, on the one hand, caused by slow social development, peculiar human interaction with wilderness, unstable harsh climate, landscape and natural character of the mountains, the risks posed by certain natural disasters, scarce population, demographic and economic characteristics of mountain villages, gas heating lack, land and arable land shortage, "alienation of the main forestry income from the people of the Carpathians, decline of the local economy, namely the traditional livestock industry – sheep breeding, and, on the other hand, caused by flagrant errors and disadvantages of forestry and forest management etc."³⁷, schools uniformity, weak economic facilities, lack of professional personnel, remoteness from the cultural, scientific, administrative centers, railway stations.

Teachers also feel the impact of mountainous landscape. Working in a small, often closed team, isolated from daily contact with fellow-professionals, in the atmosphere of professional, social, economic and political information scarcity, living in difficult natural conditions, the teacher "ages" quickly, his professional and social activity is gradually decreasing. We believe that such circumstances cause social competence development recession.

Alternatively, rural mountain area can be described as a specific spiritual and ecological environment for human development with rich traditions, life values, romanticism and optimism. These conditions undoubtedly affect the training, education and development of mountain children and teachers' professional and social activities, since the school doesn't have only professional, but also a social function; it is an important factor of social changes.

It should be noted that the impact of natural and economic conditions for the development of personality has been stressed by eminent philosophers, psychologists, ethnologist and teachers. We meet a reference to M. Gogol in a publication by a famous Ukrainian ethno psychologist M. Piren²² on irreversible loss that mentality of the nation and its spirituality suffers as a result of any acts of distortion and destruction of the environment as the centre of national life.

Nature determines the peoples appearance, since "a man imbues his natural environment, masters it, realizing his own objectives and at the same time enriches himself, his life and body, and, indirectly, his soul and thoughts are enriched by the nature"⁷, thus the man and the nature feel mutual interference.

O. Kulchytsky, I. Rybchyn, D. Chyzhewsky^{4,12} explained the Ukrainian character on numerous occasions considering the influence of environmental factors on it.

Thought-provoking is the report by Oleksandra Savchenko on the need to take into consideration the environment impact in the modern school designing procedure. The scholar states that this most important component, functioning as an active teacher's ally for broad positive impact on pupils, was previously ignored in Ukrainian education. Today, this approach is very popular and widely applied in theory and practice of innovative schools; it has turned into a methodological principle of management research for a modern rural school, a huge reserve of modernization for it. Not only the content and new information technologies should be a powerful molding factor, but education environment as well. This is especially true for rural schools where children are engaged in active interaction with the natural, social, gaming, educational, recreational, manipulative and professional environment^{27;28}.

By the way, there is quite a strong and longstanding tradition to use such notions as "sociocultural situation", "socio-cultural dynamics", "sociocultural context of education" analyzing the evolution of education as a social and cultural phenomenon. We attempted to examine the nature of "socio-cultural environment of rural schools"^{35;36}.

The study of the Russian scholar A. Tsyurulnikov also draws our attention. He writes his books based on the material of the long-term educational expeditions to Yakutia, Komi Republic, the Southern Urals, the Altai mountains and Karelia, discovers a unique phenomena in Russian education - unexplored sociocultural phenomena, processes happening in rural mountain schools, in the schools of the Far North. Based on global experience of countries that are intensively developing, their transition from a society that imitates to the society that produces its own ideas (so-called "Asian dragons": China, Japan, Southeast Asia) is closely connected to a combination of modernization with cultural tradition, effective general civilizational transformation of schools on a national basis³³. Anatoly Tsyurulnykov points out the need of another mental sociocultural paradigm and a different approach to the organization and development of the education system. In addition, the author emphasizes another important factor – ethnoregional. On the one hand, it can appear a kind of specification, an ethnic link to a particular place of its historical fate realization, patterns of life and thought formation, specifying the nature education. On the other hand, ethnoregional factor is the essence of education, which is manifested in its purpose, content, philosophy and technology, construction and organization framework, types of schools: the abovementioned vary in national ethnoregional coordinates and result from this ethnoregional factor³⁴.

Thus, it is possible and urgent to increase innovation processes productivity while maintaining the national spirit and the environment, while a rural mountain school teacher, particularly in the elementary school, since he works with students whose age is the most sensitive, should learn to interact with the changing environment, developing his own and his students' social competence.

The matter in question is the development of social intelligence, social skills, ability to establish social contacts, a gift to respond flexibly, adapt to changes in society and act accordingly to solve the problematic nature of the interpersonal situation, tackle not only the issues of narrow professional content but "borderline", located at the intersection of various fields, identify social initiatives, leadership skills, master new social roles and functions (information, marketing, design, monitoring etc.), take advantage of the natural factors for better all-round harmonious development of students to increase the efficiency of the educational process etc.

Thus, what is meant here is the pedagogical orientation of the teacher in the rural mountain schools in the social environment, the construction of the activities taking into account the needs of people living in rural areas, historical and social traditions, socio-economic and cultural opportunities in the region, i.e. the relevance and development of teachers social competence, particularly in the elementary school in an ever-changing socio-cultural environment in rural mountain areas.

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