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GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

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Annotation. An outline of the ways of recognizing and utilizing the cultural heritage of culturally and linguistically diverse children in Russian schools. As we can see, all the principles that I have extracted from Gay's study, are closely interrelated and interdependent. I consider three of them to be the major ones. Using students' background knowledge requires acknowledging the legitimacy of their heritage cultures and incorporating multicultural resources. By supporting intergenerational relationships and celebrating individual accomplishments we help students maintain their identities. Developing critical thinking is impossible without encouraging students to explore complex identities and allowing them to be ethnically expressive.

Key words: culturally responsive teaching, cultural heritage, intergenerational relationships, multicultural resources, maintaining identity, celebrating individual accomplishments.

The multicultural world of modern Russia is being composed of not only ethnical minorities — the indigenous peoples (for example, Udmurt, Tatar, Bashkir, Mordva, Marii, etc.), but also of immigrants coming from the neighboring countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, etc.).

Bi-lingual children bring different cultures and different mentalities to schools. In this connection, teachers have often encountered situations that learners show high level of affective filter because of either

- 1) limited Russian language proficiency or
- 2) mentality patterns that don't always match the "mainstream" ("Russian") cultural norms.

It happens mostly because teachers, as professionals, fail to make quality contact with their learners. They fail to acknowledge the rich cultural potential of every single student. This failure leads to imposing

an alternative civic identity (namely, exclusively Russian) on learners, and this in turn either gives rise to internal resistance (which leads to poor academic growth) or causes complete assimilation into the mainstream culture. This paper explains the ways of recognizing and utilizing the cultural heritage of Russian language learners in educational process.

A very precise definition of culturally responsive teaching is given by Geneva Gay, Professor of Education at the University of Washington-Seattle, USA:

"A very different pedagogical paradigm is needed to improve the performance of ... students from various ethnic groups — one that teaches *to and through* their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments. Culturally responsive teaching is this kind of paradigm... It filters curriculum content and teaching strategies through their cultural frames of reference

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to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master” [1, P. 26].

Thus, using students’ cultural background as one of the primary resources for teaching is the idea of Gay’s new “pedagogical paradigm”. She sees helping students to attain higher levels of academic achievement as the major goal of culturally responsive teaching. I also want to refer to the benefits of culturally responsive teaching described by another American scholar, Tish Arciniega, described in 1975. It is, first, “the creative ability to approach problem-solving activities with a built-in repertoire of bicultural perspectives” [2, P. 167]. Second, this nurtured ability of critical thinking would “enable all students to become positive contributors to a culturally dynamic society consistent with cultural origins” [2, P. 165]. So, according to Arciniega, harmonious co-existence of culturally diverse people is the long-run objective of culturally responsive pedagogy.

In this article I am considering the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy offered by Gay (2010). Even though Gay calls them just “descriptive characteristics” [1, P. 31], in this paper, they are referred to by my term of preference, *principles*, because I consider these principles to be the guide and the target every school teacher should follow and strive for. In formulating the principles, I either adhere to Gay’s statements, or use my own perception of them.

Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning ... more ... effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students [1, P. 31].

This is the principle which any education starts with: validating students’ background knowledge is the key to successful teaching and learning.

Gay argues that culturally responsive teaching “acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum” [1, P. 31]. This is about affirming students’ cultural heritages which benefits toward maintaining their identities.

Culturally responsive teaching “builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences ... between academic abstractions and lived

sociocultural realities” [2, P. 31]. Russian language studying is intertwined with students’ social life which is, first of all, their families — their bi-/multilingual parents and relatives. Culture starts with family. So, when we use students’ cultures (namely, the discourse of their family relationships) as a “worthy content” [1, P. 31] for teaching, we help them in building intergenerational relationships. It is especially important in the context of immigrants’ lives, where generation gap is aggravated by the growing difference in linguistic skills (both in heritage languages and Russian) between parents and children.

Culturally responsive pedagogy “incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools” [1, P. 32]. This is the principle of enrichment: it calls for broadening students’ scope of knowledge and going beyond their background and cultural heritage.

Culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, emotional and political learning by using cultural resources to teach knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes... Along with improving academic achievement, these approaches to teach are committed to helping students ... maintain identity and connections with their ethnic groups and communities [1, P. 32].

In my opinion, teacher’s job is a profession tied closely to social work. So, one of teacher’s goals is to facilitate students’ emotional well-being by supporting their ethnic integrity. As I mentioned earlier, by recognizing the worthiness of students’ cultural knowledge and incorporating it into the content of curriculum, we help them in maintaining their ethnic wholeness, in other words — identities.

Here is how Gay describes the empowering aspect of culturally responsive teaching: It enables students to be better human beings and more successful learners... Teachers must show students that they expect them to succeed and commit themselves to making success happen... They plan accordingly and create infrastructures to support the efforts of students so that they will persevere toward high levels of academic achievement. This is done by bolstering students’ morale, providing resources and personal assistance... developing an ethos of achievement, and celebrating individual and collective accomplishments [1, P. 34—35].





"If education is to empower marginalized groups, it must be transformative" [1, P. 36]. Here, Gay uses the definition of "being transformative" given by Banks (1991, p. 131, as cited in Gay): it is about helping "students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic action" [1, P. 36].

Here is how Gay describes the liberating aspect of culturally responsive teaching: It releases the intellect of students ... from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing... It helps students realize that no single version of "truth" is total and permanent... Students are taught how to apply new knowledge generated by various ethnic scholars to their analysis of social histories, issues, problems, and experiences. These learning engagements encourage and enable students to find their own voices, to contextualize issues in multiple cultural perspectives, to engage in more ways of knowing and thinking, and to become more active participants in shaping their own learning [1, P. 37—38].

Developing critical thinking is impossible without exploring different perspectives and "versions of truth", and teacher's role is to expose students to multiple opportunities of this exploration.

This is another facet of the liberating aspect. The freedom to be ethnically expressive removes the psychological stress associated with a psychic energy deployed in "covering up" or "containing" one's cultural inclinations. This reclaimed psychoemotional energy can be rechanneled into learning tasks, thereby improving intellectual attentiveness and academic achievement [1, P. 38].

Being ethnically expressive is, first of all, speaking native languages freely and willingly. Using primary language support (in both academic and social situations at school) is a scaffolding technique the benefits of which every school teacher must understand and encourage.

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