

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

CULTURAL CONTEXT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH'S SELF-ESTEEM FROM THE POLISH – CZECH BORDERLAND

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ABSTRACT

Self-evaluation is an opinion which is shaped and transformed along with human age. The younger a child is, the more superficial and situational character the self-assessment has. Its level depends on the acquired experience – the cases of success and failure. Moreover, notional thinking develops gradually with the age, changing self-evaluation into an in-depth opinion. In the text, the research results are presented of self-evaluation of borderland children and youth in the aspect of their self-assessed life achievements in regard to their potentialities (individually specified measure of quality) and the evaluation of school results (socially specified measure of quality). This constitutes a record of the current state and the one nearly 25 years ago, which also takes into account the respondents' age and residence place. What is comprised here as well are the different dimensions of the young's self-evaluation and its significance for their spiritual development, which is the essence of education.

Key words: *self-evaluation; school results; Polish-Czech borderland.*

INTRODUCTION

The revolution in information technologies, which is currently going on, is reflected in different spheres of individual and social life. First of all, this affects the economic, psychological, political and social area. “The contemporary acceleration in covering space, its shrinking, the relativism of time and value, globalization and glocalization, multi-technologization and other processes witnessed by people are historically determined. What has originated from the past functioning of societies, from economic, political and

cultural changes and from the old tradition is the current culture” (Kabacińska-Lukacz, Ratajczak, 2014, p. 96). It is the culture of immediateness, instant culture, which – as Zbyszko Melosik claims – is nothing else but the habit and necessity of living in instant alert and is “symbolized by the famous triad: fast food, fast sex, fast car” (Melosik, 2007, p. 33). This culture is also an inseparable part of the consumerist ideology, which has become a “great narration” of the contemporary society (Melosik, 2007, s. 33).

What also seems a characteristic feature of modern times is the cult of individuality. In most of Western societies, it is the individual and their needs, not a group, that is focused on (Hejwosz-Gromkowska, 2014, p. 11). Anthony Giddens indicates in his analyses that there was no cult of individuality in pre-modern culture. The contemporary idea that each individual is unique has been unknown earlier. Referring to Roy Baumaister and Emil Durkheim, Giddens claims that “in a certain sense, there was no »individual« in traditional cultures and individuality was not valued. It was only with the appearance of modern societies, especially of diversified work distribution, that a particular person became the centre of interest” (Giddens, 2010, p. 107). Thus, the contemporary social reality of the young (largely based on the patterns provided by popular culture) is much closer to the individualistic than collectivistic concept of the world. The pluralism of values, which is one of the cornerstones of the global world, not only enlarges the area of individual choices but also enhances the implementation of the chosen life model (this option is willingly used by contemporary youth). This also brings about the increasing significance of individual life strategies (Banaszak, 2014, p. 338).

Anthony Giddens notices that what emerges in the world dominated by consumption is the narcissistic individual, who wants to be attractive, good-looking and liked, and who – in order to become such – will “consume »appropriate« goods and services. In the conditions of modernity, all people live in the world of mirrors, in which they want to see their faultless and socially appreciated »Ego«” (Giddens, 2010, p. 107). In the consumerist society (in popular culture in particular), the category of authenticity seems to lose its sense and significance. With growing frequency, it has only some rhetoric or advertising value (the value added to the sold product to boost its reliability and attractiveness for the purchaser).

SELF-EVALUATION - THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In such a world, individuals are subjected to evaluation from the youngest years, receiving a lot of information about who they are and what they are worth. The spiritual sphere is the ability to answer these questions. They are not easy but they make it possible to find the sense of life, providing motivation to undertake effort and to overcome difficulty. These questions can be answered only by individuals who have a particular knowledge of themselves and an appropriate attitude to themselves and to other people. “The self-image is based not only on how others treat us, but is shaped also by comparing oneself to other similar people: peers of the same sex, race or social class. The comparisons concern appearance, abilities, beliefs and opinions, professional achievements, popularity in the group and other similar qualities. Similarity is

determined by belonging to the same group, the so called reference group” (Wosiński, 2004, p. 59).

The feeling of Ego not only comprises the knowledge of who the person is but also has an emotional-evaluative element. It is expressed in the feeling of whether and to what extent a person considers themselves valuable. This aspect is defined as self-esteem or as the attitude to oneself (Wosiński, 2004, p. 59). Most of the contemporary researchers agree that self-esteem is an affective reaction to oneself and has a double nature of a process and a quality. On one hand, it has the typical features of a quality – the permanent attitude of individuals to themselves, which distinguishes people from one another (some have negative, others more or quite positive self-esteem). Such understanding of self-esteem allows for the measurements and studies concerning its determinants, influences and aims. On the other hand, self-esteem is a process of current evaluation of one’s own self aimed at the goal – a positive conclusion about oneself. This goal is desired by the majority as it is important to reach positive conclusions concerning oneself (Wojciszke, 2014, p. 175).

Self-esteem, understood as a process, is a resultant of some schemes of the Ego, which comprise such attributes as appearance (slim, good-looking, young Ego), intelligence (wise Ego), economic status (rich Ego), honesty (moral Ego), etc. The resultant of the evaluations of these various aspects of Ego is defined as global self-esteem, which constitutes the attitude to oneself (Wosiński, 2004, p. 67). Therefore, self-esteem assumes a measure of quality, with the help of which it is possible to evaluate the results of one’s own activity. Among other things, the outcome of self-esteem depends on what type of the measure of quality has been applied. What is tested with the use of the absolute measure is whether the assumed goal has been achieved or not. Using a socially specified measure of quality, particular achievements of the individual are compared to relative achievements of other people (e.g. learners in the same class). In this case, self-esteem presents a result of such social comparison. An individually specified measure of quality is dealt with when a person compares the own results with the achievements in solving similar tasks in the past (Mietzel, 2009, p. 201).

SELF-EVALUATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH – DETERMINANTS AND IMPLICATIONS

The research results presented below concern the self-evaluation of young people’s achievements in regard to their possibilities and the self-evaluation of their learning effects. The presented results constitute the recording of the current state and the one 25 years ago, which both take into account the respondents’ age and place of residence.

In choosing the research area and samples, the combined method of purposeful sampling was used (research area and schools). Due to the cultural and social diversification of the research area, the procedure of disproportionate sampling was applied – such a procedure is based on the formula of typological representativeness of the sample, which ensures the participation in the research of respondents with particular qualities, not strictly reproducing the population structure (Nowak, 1985, p. 300).

The studies on their self-evaluation comprised 377 learners, including 183 (48.5%) of children and youth from Polish state and private primary and lower-secondary schools (105 girls, 78 boys) in Cieszyn and 194 (51.5%) of their peers from the Czech Republic (87 girls, 107 boys) educated in primary schools with Polish as the teaching language in the counties of Karvina and Frydek-Mistek. As in the 1990/1991 studies, the recent research was conducted among IV class learners from primary schools (61 from Poland, 74 from Zaolzie) as well as II class learners from lower-secondary schools in Poland (122 people) and VIII class learners from primary schools in Zaolzie (120 people). In the Czech system of education, VIII class of primary school is the counterpart of II class of Polish lower-secondary school (which lasts three years).

In the presented research, self-esteem of children and youth referred to the self-evaluation of their life achievements in regard to their possibilities (an individually specified measure of quality) and to the evaluation of school results (a socially specified measure).

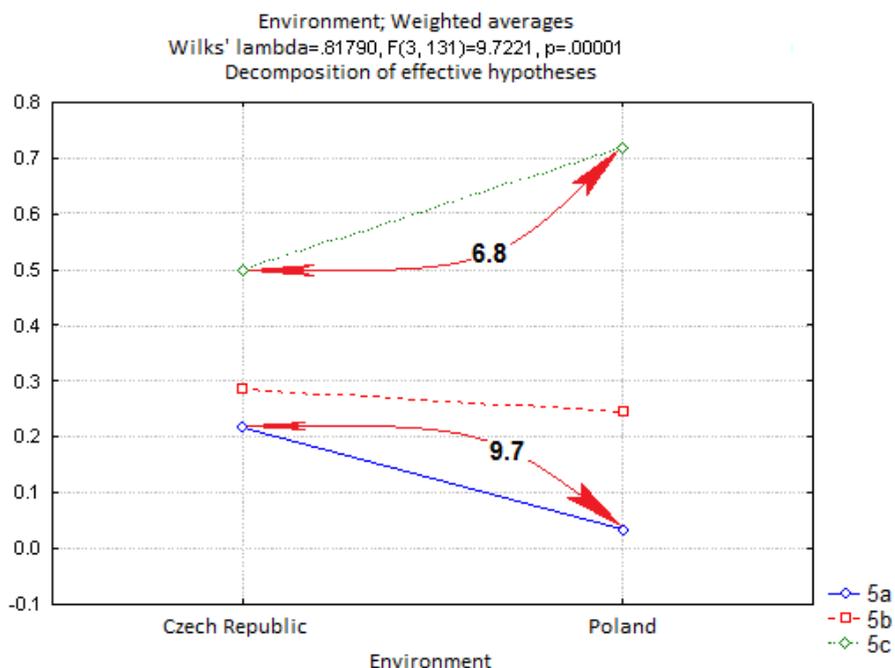


Figure 1. Self-esteem of the achievements in regard to the potentialities of IV class learners from Poland and the Czech Republic

Legend: a – substantially below the potentialities; b – slightly below the potentialities; c – adequate to the potentialities

Source: own studies

What can be noticed while analysing the data concerning the self-esteem of IV class learners in the context of an individual measure of quality is that, regardless of the residence place, children usually assess their achievements as adequate to their potentialities. However, as the statistical analysis shows, children from Poland do this more frequently than their peers from schools with Polish as the teaching language in the Czech Republic ($\chi^2 = 6.8$; $p < 0.05$ for

df= 1). The differences in self-evaluation among the respondents also refer to the category “substantially below the potentialities”. This is confirmed by the statistical analysis, which shows that in the Czech Republic children evaluate their achievements in this way more often than in Poland ($\chi^2 = 9.7$; $p < 0.05$ for $df = 1$). The differences are statistically significant¹. 28% of the respondents from the Czech Republic and 25% from Poland evaluate their achievements as slightly below the potentialities.

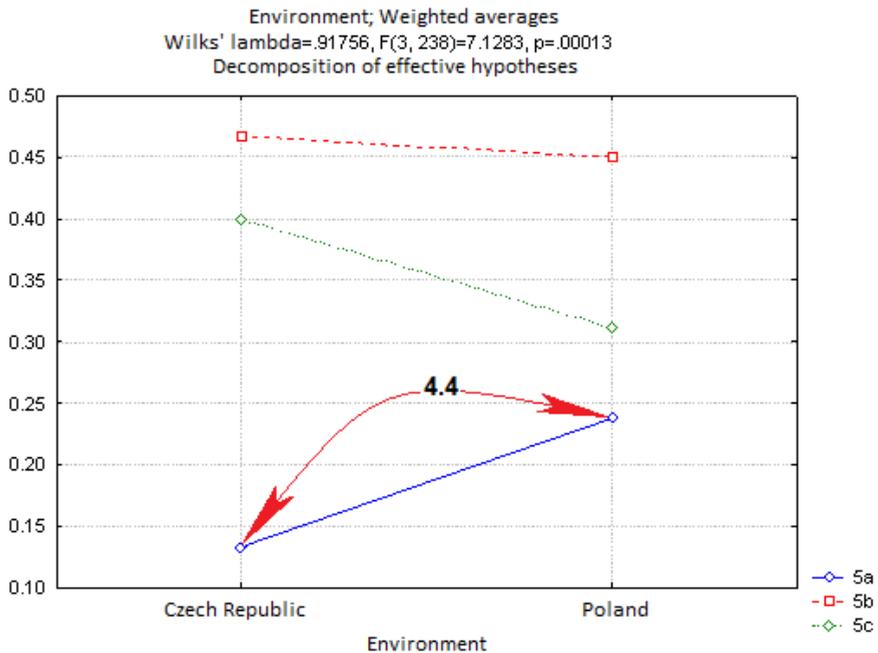


Figure 2. Self-esteem of the achievements in regard to the potentialities of VIII class learners (CZ) and lower-secondary school learners (PL)

Legend: a – substantially below the potentialities; b – slightly below the potentialities; c – adequate to the potentialities

Source: own studies

In the case of youth, regardless of their origin, the largest group comprises the respondents who assess their achievements as “slightly below the potentialities”, the second largest group declares “adequately to the potentialities”, and as regards the category “substantially below the potentialities”, the situation is the opposite to the case of younger children. Learners from class II of lower-secondary schools in Poland more frequently evaluate their achievements as much below the potentialities than their peers from class VIII of schools educating in Polish in the Czech Republic ($\chi^2 = 4.4$; $p < 0.05$ for $df = 1$).

What turned out to be interesting during the research was comparing the self-evaluations concerning the achievements in relation to potentialities of the learners from Czech schools with Polish as the teaching language, declared

¹ All the differences between the results in which $p < 0.05$ are statistically significant.

currently and 24 years ago. The data illustrating the results of the comparison are presented in Table 1.

The IV class learners (year 1990/91) more frequently evaluated their achievements as “slightly below the potentialities” (45.0%) than their peers in 2014/15 (28.0%), half of whom recognized the achievements as “adequate to the potentialities” (1990/91 – 41%).

The VIII class learners both now and 25 years ago have been more critical about their own achievements. Only 31% of learners in the 1990s recognized them as “adequate to the potentialities”, this evaluation was more frequent among current VIII class learners. One fourth of the respondents in 1990/91 evaluated their achievements as “substantially below the potentialities”. This evaluation was less frequent among their contemporary peers (13.0%). In both groups, the evaluation “slightly below the potentialities” was the most frequent.

Table 1

The comparison of the self-evaluation concerning achievements of IV and VIII class learners from the Czech Republic

| Answers | IV class learners | | | | VIII class learners | | | |
|--|--------------------|------|-------------------|------|---------------------|------|--------------------|------|
| | year 1991 N=148 | | year 2015 N=74 | | year 1991 N=120 | | year 2015 N=120 | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Substantially below the potentialities | 21 | 14.0 | 16 | 22.0 | 31 | 26.0 | 16 | 13.0 |
| Slightly below the potentialities | 66 | 45.0 | 21 | 28.0 | 52 | 43.0 | 56 | 47.0 |
| Adequately to the potentialities | 61 | 41.0 | 37 | 50.0 | 37 | 31.0 | 48 | 40.0 |

Legend: N – numer of surveyed learners

Source: own studies

It can be noticed that the self-evaluation of the own achievements in regard to the potentialities depends on age (younger learners have a higher level of self-evaluation), the place of residence (Polish IV class learners often evaluate themselves higher and the youth most often assess their achievements as “substantially below the potentialities” than their peers in the Czech Republic) and time (current IV class and VIII class learners from the Czech Republic more often evaluate themselves higher than their peers 25 years ago).

Another important element of learners’ self-education is the opinion concerning their learning results. The data on the self-evaluation of learning results of IV class learners are comprised in Figure 3 and 4.

Irrespective of the residence place, the same percentage of learners assess their learning results as good, more children from Poland (39%) than from Czech schools educating in Polish (20%) evaluate them as very good. This is confirmed by the statistical analysis ($\chi^2 = 5.9$; $p < 0.05$; for $df = 1$). Czech

learners consider their learning results as average (24%) more often than their peers from Poland (8%), which is also confirmed by the statistical analysis ($\chi^2 = 6.2$; $p < 0.05$; for $df = 1$).

Regardless of the inhabited country, the fewest learners evaluate their learning results as extreme – poor (Poland – 8%, Czech Republic – 9%) or very good (Poland – 13%, Czech Republic – 16%). Yet, VIII class learners from schools with Polish as the teaching language in the Czech Republic regard their results as good (which is confirmed by the statistical analysis: $\chi^2 = 11.2$; $p < 0.05$ for $df = 1$) or average ($\chi^2 = 10.3$; $p < 0.05$; for $df = 1$) more often than their peers from Poland. The differences are statistically significant.

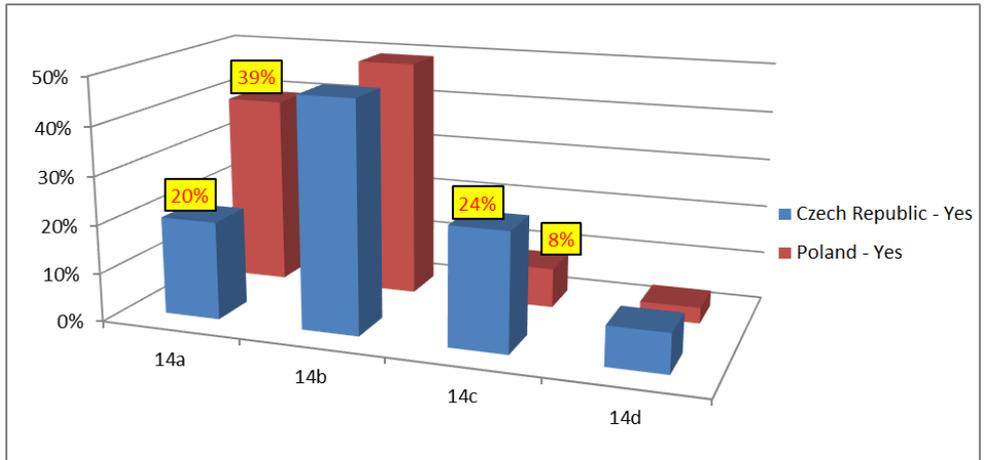


Figure 3. The residence place versus self-evaluation of learning results of IV class learners

Legend: a – very good; b – good; c – average; d – poor

Source: own studies

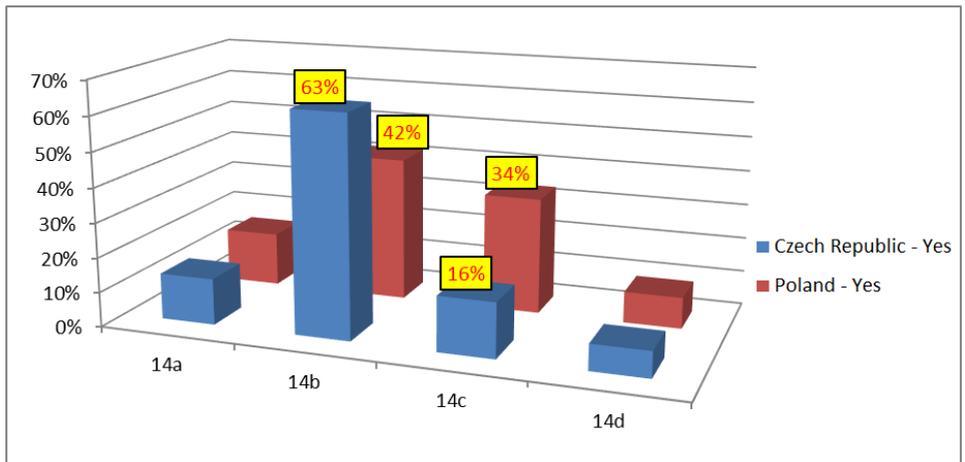


Figure 4. The residence place versus self-evaluation of learning results of VIII class learners (CZ) and lower-secondary school learners (PL)

Legend: a – very good; b – good; c – average; d – poor

Source: own studies

Similarly to the self-evaluation of their achievements in regard to the potentialities, while expressing opinions about their learning results, younger learners were less strict and more children assessed them as “very good” and “good”. Regardless of the age, in both groups, the fewest respondents gave themselves the extreme evaluations and the most – good ones. These data confirm that learners do not maximize their self-evaluation but aim at keeping it at a satisfactory level (Wojciszke, 2014, pp. 189-190), in this case – the good level. The very good self-evaluation was most often given by IV class learners from Poland, the average – in the Czech Republic. This is similar to the previous category of self-evaluation.

Still before starting school and at its beginning, children have an optimistic tendency to overrate their abilities. During school education, their self-evaluation becomes more and more realistic. As Gerd Mietzel indicates, “this change is particularly strongly enhanced by the teacher, who provides their learners with diversified and public comments on their results” (Mietzel, 2009, p. 200). First of all, teachers should do their best not to fulfil the control function but the informative one. There is a dependence which indicates that “when parents or teachers, both in words and acts, appear as »an organ of supervision«, they have to be aware that their children will be satisfied with poor achievements” (Mietzel, 2009, p. 2002). Moreover, what is assumed today is teachers’ readiness to change their traditionally understood role, in which they gave marks to learners. In the reformed conditions, it is the learner who is encouraged to independent self-evaluation. What comes into being in this way are the chances of stimulating and maintaining children’s inner motivation (Mietzel, 2009, p. 467), owing to which they undertake tasks, because the activities related to this are associated with satisfying experiences. The activities are undertaken of children’s own will as they are felt to be exciting, challenging and simply pleasant. These are situations in which inner (intrinsic) motivation is activated. Therefore, the teacher should make learners view themselves as sufficiently talented to take control over themselves (Mietzel, 2009, p. 376). A person is intrinsically motivated “when two conditions are fulfilled: one should perceive oneself as competent and should have the feeling that is largely able to control oneself and, in this way, identify oneself” (Mietzel, 2009, p. 375).

CONCLUSIONS

Self-evaluation is an opinion which is shaped and which changes along with the human age. The younger the child, the more superficial and situational it is. The level of self-evaluation depends on the acquired experience – cases of both success and failure. Moreover, what gradually develops with age is notional thinking – thus, self-evaluation becomes an in-depth opinion. Growing significance is also attributed to other people’s opinions (mostly of the peer group), to observation, to assessing and comparing to people from the nearest environment, to analysing the positive and negative aspects of the own personality. Therefore, self-evaluation of youth gets some attributes of mature assessment. Young people become aware of and start to experience their own separateness and the independence of their self-judgements from adults’ opinions, because they can look at themselves critically. This can be exemplified by the obtained research results as, regardless of the age, younger

children evaluated themselves – in both categories – higher than their older friends. What can be noticed in the case of comparing self-evaluations of learners from the Czech Republic made currently and 25 years ago is the tendency to higher self-assessment. Self-evaluation is a complex phenomenon and it can be supposed that various cultural environments facilitate shaping some of its aspects, inhibiting the development of others. The need for high self-evaluation may be universal but its particular behavioural manifestations may differ depending on the cultural context. Trying to explain higher self-evaluation of contemporary learners, it can be assumed that it might be associated with the gradual transition from the culture of collectivism to the culture of individualism in the Czech Republic. However, the research into this interrelation is still being conducted (Matsumoto, & Juang, 2007, p. 396–397). It is thought that the self-image is shaped as a result of social experience and the information obtained from others in the process of education. The feeling who the individual feels depends on cultural specificity. Therefore, “in the so called individualistic cultures, such as the USA, Canada, West Europe, Australia, where focus is on individual achievements, independence from other people and freedom of choice, the independent Ego is shaped. Yet, in collectivistic cultures (e.g. Asian, African, Middle East, South American ones), where focus is on harmonious relations in the group, loyalty and solidarity towards its members, the interdependent Ego is shaped” (Wosińska, 2004, p. 63).

The independent Ego means defining oneself through what distinguishes a person from others – in categories of (independent from the social context) individual qualities, abilities, experiences and emotions. A person with the independent Ego considers as the main life task the expression of the own unique Ego, achieving the own goals and maximizing the own interests. For such an individual, fulfilling these tasks is the foundation of happiness. The interdependent Ego means defining oneself in the categories of context-dependent relations with others and the undertaken social roles. For a person with the interdependent Ego, the main life task is belonging to the community and finding a place in it. What is aimed at is fulfilling the group interests, adjusting to others and maintaining harmonious social relations. This constitutes the basis for self-evaluation and the feeling of happiness. Thus, social relations of people with the independent and the interdependent Ego look differently – the former express their wishes and expectations and expect the same from others, the latter assume that their partners (if they are cared for) will make efforts to guess these wishes (Wojciszke, 2010, p. 184). The gradual transition from the culture of collectivism to individualism in the Czech Republic and also in Poland is confirmed by the results of some studies on the features of work typical of the profession which the respondents would like to undertake. It has turned out that, for the majority, the most important value is not what is common but what is subjective.

However, irrespectively of the cultural determinants of self-evaluation, people pay attention to their own value if they experience acceptance by others. Therefore, it becomes an important task of the teacher – particularly in primary school but also at higher educational levels – to support learners in their building of the sound feeling of self-esteem. Experiencing the own resourcefulness should be viewed as its important constituent. Yet, this type of emotions can take place only in the situation of communality, when children

establish contacts to collect experience and learn mutual acceptance. If one accepts oneself, according to a fundamental principle, it will be easier for this person to refer positively to other people. Individuals must develop the feeling of belonging to the group towards which they have social obligations (Mietzel, 2009, p. 141–142). The teacher who passes down to learners positive messages concerning their looks or behaviour and who appreciates their efforts, lets them know that s/he is interested in them and that they are important regardless of their achievements. Collecting such experiences should start in kindergarten or at the beginning of school at the latest (Mietzel, 2009, p. 142). The necessity to defend and the raising of the feeling of self-esteem is common due to important functions fulfilled by positive self-evaluation. Both teachers and parents should remember that it protects from fear (as a bumper), warns of social exclusion (as a sociometer), and – first of all – enhances the implementation of the goals undertaken by an individual through raising subjective chances for the own successful activities. This intensifies efforts in acting, which results in higher outcomes and, in return, boosts self-evaluation. As a rule, positive self-evaluation is beneficial for the individual, but in some specific conditions (when it intensifies the fulfilment of harmful or impossible aims), it may lead to unfavourable effects (Wojciszke, 2014, p. 198).

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КУЛЬТУРНИЙ КОНТЕКСТ САМООЦІНКИ ДІТЕЙ ТА МОЛОДІ З ПОЛЬСЬКО-ЧЕСЬКОЇ ПРИКОРДОННОЇ ТЕРИТОРІЇ

Мінчановська Олександра, доктор наук, доцент, Факультет етнології і освітніх наук, Сілезький університет в Катовіцах, вул. Бельська, 62, 43-400 Цешин, Республіка Польща, aleksandraminczanowsk@interia.pl

Самооцінка – оцінка особистістю самої себе, яка формується і трансформується разом з віком людини. Чим менша дитина, тим більші поверхневою і ситуативною є самооцінка. Її рівень залежить від набутого досвіду, зокрема випадків успіху та невдач. Більше того, понятійне мислення розвивається поступово з віком, змінюючи самооцінку в глибоку думку. У тексті представлені результати дослідження самооцінки дітей та молоді з прикордонних територій в аспекті самооцінювання життєвих досягнень щодо їх потенціалу (індивідуально визначений показник якості) та оцінки шкільних результатів (соціально визначений показник якості). У дослідженні враховано вік респондентів і їх місце проживання. Розглянуто різні аспекти самооцінки молоді та її значення для духовного розвитку особистості, що, у свою чергу, є сутністю освіти. Автор робить висновок, що самооцінка молоді отримує деякі атрибути зрілої оцінки. Молоді люди усвідомлюють і починають відчувати свою самотність і незалежність від власного судження з точки зору дорослих, оскільки вони можуть критично дивитися на себе. Молодші діти оцінювали себе вище, ніж старші друзі. Незалежно від культурних детермінант самооцінки, люди звертають увагу на власну цінність, якщо вони відчують прийняття іншими. Тому важливим завданням вчителя - особливо в початковій школі, а також на вищих освітніх рівнях - є підтримка учнів у формуванні здорового почуття власної гідності. Необхідність захищати та піднімати почуття власної гідності є спільною через важливі функції, що виконуються позитивною самооцінкою. І вчителі, і батьки повинні пам'ятати, що вона захищає від страху, попереджає про соціальне виключення, і - перш за все, посилює реалізацію цілей, які виконуються окремими людьми шляхом підвищення суб'єктивних шансів для власних успішної діяльності.

Ключові слова: польсько-чеська прикордонна територія; самооцінка; шкільні результати.

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