

# The Role of Ethnopedagogics in the Development of Empathic Culture in Students

Alfiya Nikolaevna Valiahmetova<sup>1</sup> & Indira Maratovna Salpykova<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kazan (Volga region) Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation

Correspondence: Alfiya Nikolaevna Valiahmetova, Kremlyovskaya Streid, 18, Kazan, 420008, Russian Federation. E-mail: valiahmetova-alfiya@mail.ru

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## Abstract

The article explores challenges associated with formation of empathic culture in students by the means of ethnopedagogics. This publication clarifies the concepts of “empathy” and “empathic culture of personality” as they are used in psychology and folk pedagogy and uncovers a growing potential for ethnopedagogics in the cultivation of empathic culture in the younger generation.

**Keywords:** education, students, empathy, empathic culture and pedagogy

## 1. Introduction

Radical changes in social, interpersonal and ethnic relations in modern Russian society have had many negative phenomena: moral impoverishment of society, increasing brutality and lack of sympathy, mercy, compassion, sensitivity and mutual help. Substitution of moral values takes place when traditional humanistic ideals of goodness, love and mercy are replaced with indifference, pragmatism, and cruelty. The desire for prosperity and more immediate results come forward as we are told to win, surpass and succeed in every possible way. A growing generation gap, alienation of relatives, the loss of spiritual and moral relations become widespread. Of particular concern is the indifference observed among children and adolescents in the recent years to the less fortunate people around them and to the problems of others.

It should be noted that the present system of the Russian education system gives students comprehensive knowledge, but pays little attention to ethics. Vocational schools, universities and schools in general are primarily concerned with academic knowledge, and each student understands that a teacher has no right to give them a lower grade because of cruel behavior towards others or acting in a selfish manner. This contributes to the development of negative social attitudes which hinder interaction with others. All this points to a decline in empathy among people, empathy being understood as an ability to comprehend the emotional states and feelings of another person.

In this situation the school at present faces a very important task: that of educating a person capable of empathy and compassion towards others, and ready to understand and help them, i.e. the task of teaching the next generation empathy.

Interest among students in the subject of empathy has been strong for decades, fostered by the great importance attached to the role of empathy in the development of personality and a sense of morality, especially important during the period of adolescence.

Initially, the problems associated with the concept of empathy were the objects of study of philosophical disciplines such as ethics and aesthetics. The concept of empathy goes back to the term *sympathy*, which was interpreted by philosophers as responsiveness and emotional complicity.

In the science of psychology the concept of empathy was introduced in 1909 by an American psychologist E. Titchener, who combined the ideas of the theory of sympathy and empathy authored by E. Klifford and T. Lipps. E. Titchener considered empathy to be the highest and most human form of sympathy (Titchener, 1898).

German philosopher and psychologist T. Lipps developed the concept of aesthetic education and used the term “empathy” to describe the process of comprehending of a work of art, objects of nature, and, later, humans (Lipps, 2010).

In contrast to the rationalism of ethical systems M. Scheler sought to identify the specifics of sympathy as a genuine form of relations between people. M. Scheler believed that sympathy was not only an ability to share other people's feelings, but also an intentional act aimed at understanding another person as the highest value. Expression of love in an act of sympathy is more significant from the point of view of social consequences of involvement in the lives of others (Scheler, 2011).

The Psychological Dictionary defines "empathy" as follows: "Empathy" (compassion, ability to put yourself in other people's shoes) is an individual's ability to respond to the emotional experiences of others. Empathy involves subjective perception of another person's insight into their inner world, understanding of their experiences, thoughts and feelings (Mescheryakov & Zinchenko, 2004, p. 302).

Empathy is seen by scholars as a complex psychological entity that has cognitive (understanding of other people's experiences), emotional (emotional responsiveness to the feelings of another person) and behavioral (the desire to help, empathy manifestations in behavior and activity) channels (Vilunas, 1976). Development of empathy is a process of forming spontaneous moral motives and motivations in favor of another person. But it should be noted that compassion and empathy are different phenomena. Compassion towards someone and ability to share their emotions, especially grief or suffering includes sympathy and pity. Empathy, in its turn, implies an ability to understand and mentally penetrate another human being's inner world. In other words, empathy implies acceptance and understanding of the role of another person, and their feelings, thoughts and attitudes (Jacobson, 1984).

## 2. Methods

Methods: systematic structural analysis of philosophical, axiological, sociological, psychological, educational, cultural, musicological, ethnopedagogical research; a combination of the author's own and other leading pedagogical experience in line with the study's subject.

## 3. Results

In the Higher School of Arts named after Salih Saidashev of the Kazan Privolzhsky Federal University the work programmes covering the discipline 050100.62 "Pedagogical Education" (Music) taking into account ethno-regional element have been developed and implemented in the educational process. The curricula on the disciplines: "History of Tatar Music", "Music of the Peoples of Povolzhye", "History and Practice of Tatar Choir Culture", "Folk Music Creativity", "Tatar Ethnomusicology" and others, enable the students—the future teachers of music focus their attention to the humanistic values, contribute to the development of empathic culture, of moral system of values, of patriotism and tolerant culture.

The results of training of that discipline have revealed quantitative and qualitative changes. The level of the formedness of empathic culture of the students of Higher School of Arts named after Salih Saidashev of the Kazan Privolzhsky Federal University has shown the rise in all performances. This is being confirmed by the students' creative activity and empathic conduct. They are open to show their own feelings, they are sincerely eager to share their emotions and are capable not only to see the emotions of others but to share their own ones.

## 4. Discussions

The present psychological and pedagogical matter has not been fully researched by academics or educators, and, therefore remains relevant. Some academics believe empathy to be an innate property of a person. At some point a child starts to partake in the other people's emotions, starts to understand the importance of another person, and develops and retains the need for other people's well-being (Yusupov, 1995).

Other research suggests that this ability is not present in children of school age, and its development occurs during their socialization, in the process of social adaptation while they interact with others (Craig & Bokum, 2005).

The third group of academics believes that a child's family plays an important role in the development of empathy. The child's future is determined by the education that is provided within his or her family and is shaped by the personal qualities that are developed and nurtured. He or she can become an empathic person, i.e. capable of listening to others, understanding their inner world, subtly responsive to the mood of a person they are interacting with, and helpful to others. Or they can develop opposite qualities and become self-centered, prone to conflict, unable to establish good relations with people. Empathy and trust between family members in many ways contributes to a balanced personal development. In order to develop the ability to empathize, sympathize and help another person, one needs to experience a friendly family environment (Vallon, 1967).

In any case, empathy is a person's ability manifested primarily in situations of interpersonal interaction, and that culture should be continuously improved. In an academic environment success of this process will depend on the

teacher's ability to put himself in a student's shoes and on a teacher's willingness to understand their student's inner world (Fridman et al., 1988).

Emotional sensitivity, typical of an ethically mature person, manifests itself in the heart becoming susceptible to a kind word, request, or advice. This responsiveness is the basis of morality and an empathic personality (Nasenkova, 1997).

Personal empathic culture is a system which contains all of the following components:

- Humane attitude towards another person;
- An ability to understand emotional experiences of others and to respond to these experiences;
- An ability to listen, see, feel another person's emotional state, as if being in his body and a desire to do something for him or her;
- Emotional identification, personal reflection, moral consciousness, the process of entering another person's inner world and feeling "at home", the mechanism of interpersonal communication that allows harmony.

The following are the prerequisites for the implementation of a culture of personal empathy through ethno-cultural mechanisms:

- Unification of academic education and personal development by incorporating folk pedagogy into a learning process and drawing teenagers' attention to their ethical values;
- Creation of an environment of mutual understanding and cooperation in schools, respect for each student's personality;
- Assurance of interaction between school, family and society in the process of cultivation of empathy in the younger generations.

Theoretical questions on the subject of formation of personal empathic culture, along with those on the subject of cultivation of humanity and morality have been most comprehensively researched by N. Anikeeva, A. Bodalev, D. Vilkeev, T. Gavrilova, A. Nasifullina, L. Sirotkin, and others.

The following authors worked on the subject of using progressive traditions of various peoples in the education of the young: V. Afanasev, G. Vinogradov, G. Volkov, Z. Nigmatov, T. Petrova, Y. Hanbikov and A. Huzina. The works of these scholars reveal the essential creative role of pedagogical traditions in the process of education of younger generation.

The works of E. Artamonova, Z. Vidyakova, L. Golubeva, L. Karpushina, V. Medushevskiy, A. Ovchinnikov and other educators have contributed in the area of cultivation of spiritual and moral values in youth on the basis of traditional national culture.

At the same time, analysis of existing works shows that the subject of formation of empathic culture in teenagers through ethnopedagogic instruments has not been researched very well. Meanwhile folk pedagogy offers many tools for the smooth introduction of children to the world around them and for the cultivation of their moral values. During many centuries folk pedagogy has been developing a system of education for children, teenagers and young adults. This multidimensional, powerful, complex and controversial system has been tried and adopted by many generations. It allows the rising generation to develop some vital skills that would help them succeed in life and work, obtain knowledge about the surrounding world and other people; it teaches them to be clever about their spare time and to preserve and pass over ethnical and musical heritage (Melnikov, 1987).

Folk pedagogy sees formation of empathic culture as cultivation of feelings of empathy, mercifulness, humanity, and the ability to understand others' feelings and empathize with their sorrows and happiness. It doesn't require special didactic methods or a dedicated didactic environment. Instead it relies on factors that naturally compliment each other:

- Defensive instincts that adults have towards children.
- Continuous involvement of a child in all existing types of human relationships, all aspects of life, an entire range of social and personal communication types.
- The effect of communication with people of the same age and different age, and other factors (Pankin, 2004).

With this, the following are the means of folk pedagogy contributing to the formation of an empathic culture among students: folklore, folk music; and methods: persuasion, example, blessing, covenant. Pedagogy teaches lessons of humanity and introduces basic concepts of morality, ethics and patriotism (Volkov, 2004).

Consider these factors in terms of their potential for creating an empathic culture among the younger generations by means of folk pedagogy.

The most important component of national folk culture that has significant educational capabilities are children's games. They help to teach and develop in children a sense of empathy towards each other, compassion, friendship, mutual respect and help. In the process of playing children develop physically, polish their language skills, learn to interact, to behave, and to develop derived emotions (Yagvildina, 2002).

A respectful and reverential attitude to nature promoted formation of personal empathic cultures in folk pedagogy. Nature and animals were treated with love and empathy, as people were trying to appease them and obtain their protection, thereby ensuring prosperity and security in life. Kindness to animals was taught in a strict and instructive manner, as it is clear, for example, from the following sayings: "If you kill a toad, the cow stops giving milk" (Chuvash proverb); "Do not touch nests, whoever breaks them will be unhappy" (Mari proverb). Such strict edification had a positive value in the formation of an empathic culture, as it makes one think about consequences of one's actions. It should be noted that to many people proverbs and sayings serve as a source of intelligence, as examples to follow, as a good adviser and first mentor, as an instructive legacy of previous generations, and as an example of creative thinking (Volkov, 2004).

Folklore is international. By getting acquainted with fairy tales and songs, proverbs and rhymes of different peoples students find similarities with their own folk art, and this makes their own heritage more familiar and valuable. This is the first step towards a tolerant society (Valiahmetova et al., 2014).

Folk pedagogy sees family as the most important social institution that plays a significant role in the formation and development of personality—stability in the relationship between family members and with outside influences formation of empathic culture in teenagers. Parents, especially the mother, from time immemorial has been the primary source of moral and behavioral qualities and empathy in her child. Accordingly, formation of a moral and empathic culture in the younger generation should take place in the context of interaction between school, family and society.

One of the most important and effective ways to foster empathic culture, morality and aesthetic attitudes to the world in the younger generation is folk music, one of the varieties folk art which has absorbed richness and diversity of musical and poetic genres. Introducing children to musical folklore and native music must occur simultaneously with learning native language. Folk songs have a distinct educational focus. Lullabies, folk songs, nursery rhymes, singing games prepare a child for future life. They reflect people's traditions, its historical past, elements of peasant labor. Many fun activities and games (including musical) are a humorous imitation of adult labor process (Salpykova, 2012).

Children's musical folklore is rich and diverse in a subject matter and content, musical structure, composition, and nature of performance. Songs can be played solo, in a chorus, accompanied by a dance, as a recitative, in a roundelay, or accompanied by various musical instruments. The musical language of folk tunes is bright and vivid, and that contributes to an emotional perception of folk music culture that helps to develop children's ability to empathize, builds their emotional responsiveness, which contributes to the development of empathic culture.

Folklore is an environment in which special conditions have been established for the development of a child's spirituality. Folk art has all the necessary attributes in order to accomplish that: preservation of historical, cultural and artistic traditions; communicativeness, due to the collective nature of work and leisure; richness and expressiveness of spoken and written language; close relationship with the surrounding creative life.

Folklore as an artistic tradition of a people combines two dialectically interrelated foundations—individual and common. This set up is of fundamental importance in terms of fostering a sense of community. This is achieved through getting used to the traditions of their own people by getting involved into collective forms of song-writing lessons. As an aesthetic folklore category collectivity is implemented via a full merge of individuality with collective creativity, while preserving individual freedom and collective expression of empathy.

Being a syncretic game-like art based on a synthesis of the main types of artistic and musical activities—music, dance, folk dance, folk theater, decorative arts and crafts folklore can serve as the basis for the artistic development of an individual.

Many folk genres carry both aesthetic and ethical functions, which contributes to the intellectual development of children. Active pronunciation of counting rhymes, sayings and singing of adages fosters development of respiration and diction, formation of a child's national character through language, development and enrichment of his or her vocabulary. Improvisational and game-based qualities of oral folk art (including music) provide a

teacher with exceptional opportunities for the unrestricted development of creativity and imagination in children (Karkina et al., 2014).

## 5. Conclusion

Today, as moral indifference and social nihilism, senseless brutality, and the cult of violence flourish in modern society we face an urgent task of reviving ideals of morality, spirituality, civil responsibility and humanism. Many academics and educators believe that one way to lead society out of crisis is to make use of pedagogical potential of folk pedagogy.

Today the entire educational potential of ethnopedagogy is being actively incorporated into a modern school practice which faces the very urgent task of forming an empathic culture in the younger generation as the basis for ethical, moral, patriotic and tolerant education.

## 6. Recommendations

Findings presented in this article can be used in teaching practice as a guidance in the organization of educational process; they can be used to develop academic curriculums and teaching aids for further study of the subject of cultivating and teaching empathic culture to students by means of ethnopedagogics. However, the findings presented in this study indicate that more can be done to address this subject and further research is necessary. For example, more attention could be paid to such aspects as raising the level of professionalism and empathic culture in the educators themselves.

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