

# Features of Students’ Interaction in Multicultural Educational Environment

Ekaterina Bessonova

Department of didactics of the Institute of Pedagogy  
The Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia  
Saint-Petersburg, Russia  
bessonova1977@gmail.com

Lyudmila Borovik

Department of didactics of the Institute of Pedagogy  
The Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia  
Saint-Petersburg, Russia  
borovik\_lyudmila@bk.ru

Elena Piskunova

Department of didactics of the Institute of Pedagogy  
The Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia  
Saint-Petersburg, Russia  
l\_piskunova@mail.ru

Anastasiya Cherkasova

The Institute of foreign languages  
The Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia  
Saint-Petersburg, Russia  
anacherkasova82@gmail.com

**Abstract**—The article is devoted to the analysis of relationships within the children's multicultural team. Due to the large migration flows, the contemporary research focuses on studying the features of the educational process when participants are representatives of different cultures. Particular attention is focused on the relationships between students in the multicultural school community. The key goal of this study is to identify the understanding of the category of tolerance by the school students, as well as to analyse the specifics of the atmosphere in a multicultural class through the peculiarities of the students themselves interacting with each other and showing their interest in other cultures. Another objective of the study was to identify the possible students’ stereotypes concerning other cultures.

**Keywords:** *education in multicultural society, communication among students in school, features of interaction, tolerance as a specific feature of education*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Our study identified and confirmed the following conditions necessary to create friendly relations in children’s group within multicultural educational environment:

- participants of the educational process understand the concept of tolerance;
- in the students’ group or class the friendly and comfortable atmosphere is encouraged and promoted;
- students manage to put away their stereotypes towards different cultures.

Analysis of the study results allows to make the conclusion that interaction between students in multicultural environment

is affected by educational goals, and personal prejudices are muted within the educational process. There is an evident tendency that students formulate the category of tolerance in their consciousness, though it’s not always the case that such formulation results in a friendly atmosphere and effective interaction in everyday life.

## II. METHODS AND RESULTS

The following methods were used: analysis of state documents and school documentation; analysis of normative documents; analysis of results of previous psychological and pedagogical research on the issue; diagnostic methods: colour test of relationships (Etkind A.M); questionnaires.

Basing on the study hypothesis the understanding of interaction in multicultural educational environment was analyzed.

Features of interrelation of the concepts of communication and interaction were studied by B.G.Anan'ev, A.A. Leont'ev, S.L. Rubinstein, A.A. Bodalev, B.F. Lomov, S.Yu. Golovin etc. [1].

The analysis of works devoted to the idea of intercultural interaction in education (G.D. Dmitriev, A.P. Solokhina) shows that interaction is a factor in the development of personality as it defines the development of cultural values and the assimilation of the role system of society, and also acts as a way of countering racism, prejudice, xenophobia, bias, ethnocentrism, hatred, based on cultural differences [2]. According to the researchers, students have a different set of knowledge and different experience, which determines their intercultural competence. Such interaction is accompanied by intercultural barriers, the inability to overcome which

generates conflicts. It can be assumed that conflicts are the result of a mismatch of knowledge.

The phenomenon of tolerance as a process is studied in different academic fields: in philosophy (V.M. Zolotikhin, E.V. Magomedova, N.G. Yurovskih); in sociology and politology (V.V. Shalin, I.Z. Chimitiva); in psychology and pedagogy (A.G. Asmolov, G.U. Soldatova, D.A. Leont'ev, S.L. Bratchenko, G.B. Anan'ev, M. Veber) etc.

The Declaration of principles of tolerance specifies its criteria as respect for, appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures... it is considered as an active attitude prompted by recognition of universal rights and freedoms of man... it is the responsibility that upholds human rights, pluralism, democracy..." [3,4]. The "law on education" [5] and the "Concept of development" [6] also stipulates that "Education should promote mutual understanding, tolerance and friendship among all peoples, racial and religious groups"

According to A. G. Asmolov the concept of tolerance acts as self-education and development of ability to self-restraint [7]. By E. Erickson, the phenomenon of tolerance is associated with identity and is revealed through understanding and dialogue with others [8].

The formation of tolerance is a complex and long process that takes place throughout the life of each person, and education is one of the most important factors in its formation. The tolerance formation does not contradict the values of the national and civil consciousness [9,10].

The analysis of historical and pedagogical studies of M. A. Abdurakhmanova, D. M. Malaeva and P. V. Stepanov shows that the formation of tolerance in the conditions of educational environment can be provided under condition of direct dialogue, through the personal qualities and through the attitude to dialogue [11,12].

The question of educational environment was examined by E.A. Yamburg, N.A. Savchenko, V.I. Ginetzkiy, G.N. Serikov, L.B. Isaeva, Y.V. Sen'ko, S.G. Alekseev, P.E. Ponomarev, V.I. Slobodchikov etc. [13,14,15,16]. In the definition for the concept of educational space, there is still no consensus among researchers. Moreover, there are different points of view on the relationship between the concepts of educational space and educational environment. We agree with the opinion of V. A. Kozyrev, who argues that these concepts are not identical, but interrelated [17]. The key to understanding of this problem in pedagogy is the philosophical idea of the environment as a space of human activity. Development, self-determination and self-realization of the individuals occur in the process of interaction with the environment. The environment affects the person, the person, in turn, transforms the environment. The environment is divided into natural, natural and social, or socio-cultural, and education being part of the culture in society, where the education system is considered as a component of the socio-cultural environment [18]. That is why we consider that environment can influence individuals, and that environment is a set of objects which are characterized by having a functional specificity [19].

Educational environment acts as a set of conditions and opportunities for personal development, determined by the quality of functioning of educational institutions and socio-cultural environment. In solving the problem of understanding the educational environment of an educational institution, we relied on the idea of the essence of the school being a dynamic social institution.

The researchers note that the school's educational environment should be characterized by close relationships between students and teachers, small classes, excellent teaching, individual learning, sensitive counseling, and personal attention [20, 21, 22]. It should be noted that intercultural education brings its own specificity in the educational environment, and in this case the question of moral and ethical nature is raised more sharply. Here, the formation of tolerance is part of the educational process in the course of education, whether we are talking about a monocultural or multicultural environment, but intercultural education exacerbates the importance of this aspect.

These statements are confirmed in works of international researchers. It is predominately the teachers, mentor or the leader who creates the specific nature of educational environment [23, 24].

To study the understanding of the tolerance as a category by students, we developed a questionnaire consisting of 15 questions, including three blocks. The questionnaire begins with three questions concerning the age, sex and city of residence of a student. This information will give us a basis for analyzing responses by gender, age and geography.

We had interviewed 200 people. These were students of 5-9 classes (12-15 / 16 years) and 10-11 classes (16-18 years), living in St. Petersburg (54%) and New Urengoy Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (46%). Of these, 47% are male and 53% are female.

The first set of questions is aimed at clarifying the attitude of students to the multicultural environment in which they interact. These questions reveal the awareness of students of the existence of other cultures and ethnic groups in the world; awareness of their own identity, attitude to their own culture.

According to the results, the majority of students (77.5%) in both cities respect their own culture, 30% feel a sense of pride. 83% of respondents indicate that they are not indifferent to how representatives of other cultures relate to their own culture. Therefore, there is a question of studying the attitude of students to other cultures, the degree of understanding by students of the category "tolerance".

The question, in which students had to choose what tolerance is, gave the following results. Among students in grades 5-9, 20% defined tolerance as indifference, 38% as tolerance, 42% as respect. Among students in grades 10-11, 26% understand tolerance as indifference, 21% - as forbearance, 53% - as respect. Basing on these data, we can conclude that the number of students, who correctly understand what "tolerance" is, is rather big, but still, at the time of graduation (16-18 years), almost 50% of students still do not have the adequate understanding of this category.

Questions concerning the factors influencing the formation of tolerant or intolerant attitude towards other cultures have given mixed answers. The majority of students in grades 5-9 (67%) tend to say that their opinion and attitude to other cultures, religions, nationalities is dictated by public opinion, 23% call the family as a factor of influence. While 71.5% of students in grades 10-11 believe that their opinion on the issue of attitude to representatives of other cultures is independent. Answering questions related to the causes of possible conflicts on ethnic reasons, 89% of students believe that the reason is "the negative influence of public opinion".

Basing on the analysis of the answers to the proposed questions, we can conclude that students have an increase in the correct understanding of the category of "tolerance" in the transition from primary school to high school, and at the same time there is an awareness of students of public negative attitude to representatives of other cultures.

The second group of questions in our questionnaire is devoted to the study of the peculiarities of interaction of students within the framework of intercultural educational environment, as well as the study of their interest in other cultures, religions, nationalities.

We noted a significant difference in the attitude to interaction between representatives of different cultures depending on the region in which the study was conducted. On the question of what the student primarily pays attention to when communicating and interacting with classmates, in St. Petersburg, respondents note the personality of their interlocutor and his individuality (65.3%). In New Urengoy most of the respondents (53%) noted wariness at the beginning of communication, as they pay attention to external attributes indicating ethnic, national, religious or racial affiliation.

It should be noted that in both cases, 90% of respondents who noted that the cultural identity of a person is a determining factor in communication are representatives of the female sex.

In both localities, regardless of the age of the respondents, there is a positive trend towards acceptance of cultural diversity. Thus, 83% of students are in favor of holding events that would promote acquaintance, exchange of values between representatives of different cultures. Only 1% of students are in favor of separate education of representatives of different nations.

We conducted a study of the social relationship among students in grades 8 and 10 classes of school No. 598 (Primorsky district of St. Petersburg).

The study found that the social climate and interaction in the school communities are positive. When diagnosing the community, the "desire-unwillingness" of classmates to continue training in this group and interact with each other outside of school time was studied.

To characterize the interaction in educational and extracurricular activities, we used the color test of relations of A. M. Etkind [25]. We offered eight colors to students: 1 (blue) – friendly; 2 (green) – business; 3 (red) - responsive; 4 (yellow) - open; 5 (purple) – insincere; 6 (brown) – compliant;

7 (black) – unattractive, 0 (gray) - passive. The results of the study by this method are presented in the table I.

TABLE I. TRANSFER OF THE MEANING OF COLORS ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERACTION IN EDUCATIONAL AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Interaction characteristics	Colour							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Interaction with teachers	5%	35%	0%	23%	25%	12%	0%	0%
Interaction with classmates	12%	33%	8%	21%	16%	0%	0%	10%
Interaction during the break	3%	25%	17%	25%	10%	5%	5%	10%
Interaction during the lesson	5%	30%	12%	8%	15%	10%	4%	16%
Interaction with each other	14%	34%	7%	25%	15%	0%	5%	0%

It should be noted that detection results are the same regardless of the students' age.

It appears that "interaction with teachers" 35% of students consider as "businesslike", 23% - as "open", 25% - as "insincere", 5% - as "benevolent", 12% - as "accommodating". "Interaction with classmates" students describe as "businesslike" – 33%, "open" – 21%, "insincere" – 16%, "benevolent" – 12%, "passive" – 10%, "compassionate" – 8%.

The analysis of "interaction during the break" shows that there is a tendency for a "businesslike" communication among 25% of responders, 5% of them consider it as "unattractive", 5% - as "accommodating", 25% - as "open", 17% - as "benevolent".

"Interaction during the lesson" 5% of respondents define as "benevolent", 30% - as "businesslike", 12% - as "compassionate", 8% - as "open", 15% - as "insincere", 10% - as "accommodating", 4% - as "unattractive", 4% - as "passive".

"Interaction with each other" is considered to be "unattractive" – 5%, "compassionate" – 7%, "benevolent" – 14%, "open" – 25%, "insincere" – 15%, "businesslike" – 34%.

Thus, the interaction between the participants of the pedagogical process is reduced mainly to businesslike.

The third block of our questionnaire was aimed at identifying the presence of stereotypes about different cultural groups in the educational space and the possible impact of the presence of stereotypes on interaction in the children's team.

According to the results of our survey, students of all age groups and schools (80%) believe in a biased attitude to

students of other nationalities and religions. In both cities, 50% of students personally experienced discrimination and conflicts on ethnic or religious grounds. It should be noted that in the comments of students such negative attitude was manifested not only by students, but also by teachers.

### III. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the works of the researchers shows that interaction can be considered as a process of influence of participants on each other, due to common tasks, joint activities and reactions, and the specificity of different types of human interaction is determined by the properties that characterize them as actors. Interaction acts as a unifying factor, based on the communication of people with each other, and communication implies the development of contacts and their formation in different plans in the process of developing a common line of interaction. Communication and interaction are included in any activity and act as conditions for its success. Thus it very important to study the possible conditions for successful communication and interaction, which was done in the presented research focusing on intercultural interaction in multicultural educational environment.

There are some results of the empirical research, which deserve further discussion, and research.

We discovered that the number of students with correct understanding of what "tolerance" is, is big, it increases in the progress of age development. At that to the mature age there are still about a half of students who do not understand this category adequately. Here we find two directions of reflecting the fact. On one hand, it is important to define the factors influencing the understanding. It can be assumed that school environment is one of the most influencing factors as at the great variety of other factors like family, community and others, school is the most homogeneous and to this or that extent influencing everybody involved into the educational process. On the other hand, there is another strong factor also defined in the research – the public attitude to representatives of other cultures. As it is defined in the research the social environment strongly influences the attitude of young people. This fact is proved by another result of the research – the difference in the perceiving of the interlocutor by students from St.Petersburg and New Urengoy. Students from St.Petersburg pay most attention to the personality as a whole compared to their peers from New Urengoy who pay more attention to external attributes indicating ethnic, national, religious or racial affiliation. We consider this being the result of significant difference in the population of these cities, as well as the specifics of St. Petersburg as a historically multicultural city and today - the center of academic and professional mobility and tourism.

Continuing this reflection concerning social environment focus another important issue is worth further studying – the belief of a biased attitude to students of other nationalities and religions at school. That means that students may observe or even survive manifestations of such attitude from the part of both – students and teachers. Possible reason for that may be stereotypic thinking which was also revealed in the research.

The certain contradiction in the tolerant attitude of students to other cultures was revealed. On the one hand there is a tendency to accept other cultures, but on the other hand most of the answers to the question "What do you think there are qualities inherent in specific nationalities?" there were: "the Russians are lazy, the Germans are pedantic, the Japanese are shy and hardworking, the Caucasian peoples are aggressive, etc.": "This question was the final in the questionnaire, and in fact one of the most important. The answer to this question reveals the presence of stereotypical thinking of students of modern schools.

That is, there is a clear contradiction in the minds of students between their desired position and the real one. The level of stereotyping of their thinking is difficult to determine. But we can argue that these phenomena do not pose a serious threat to the interaction of students, but, most likely, they are the causes of insincerity and distrust in the interaction.

This fact can be proved by the following result of the research: the majority of students want to know more about other cultures and to participate in events that would promote acquaintance, exchange of values between representatives of different cultures.

### IV. CONCLUSION

The result of the study confirms the hypothesis that formation of friendly relations in the children's group in the multicultural educational environment takes place under the following conditions:

- most participants of the pedagogical process have correct understanding of the category tolerance;
- the classroom creates a favorable and comfortable atmosphere;
- most students have no stereotypes towards the representatives of other cultures.

The analysis of the results of the study allows us to conclude that the interaction of students in a multicultural educational environment is influenced by business purposes, and personal attitudes fade into the background. Students have a tendency to form correctly the category "tolerance" in their own minds, but this understanding is not always the basis for a friendly atmosphere and effective interaction in real life.

When evaluating these results, we must take into account the error in the sample of our study. The results of the study are reliable for the selected research base and can be verified by repeated diagnostics.

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