

Pre-school education and training as factors of ethnic identity preservation of foreign ukrainians in the USA and Canada

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Abstract: The article discusses the peculiarities of organization and work of Ukrainian preschools in the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada and U.S.A., which aim to develop children's national identity.

Keywords: preschool education, education, Ukrainian diaspora, children, national identity.

Study relevance. First President of School Board (SB) at UCCA (Ukrainian Educational Council - UCCA) Edward Zharsky insists that for the Ukrainian diaspora it is important not only to prepare young people to their future professional work, but also to train them, to educate them; moreover it is even more significant to prepare young people for future participation in national public life, preparation for work in the Ukrainian community and for this community, to prepare for their own cultural development and personal life. Physical, religious, moral, intellectual, child education must serve this vital task; training of the younger generation to participate in national life and social activities requires both the relevant intellectual education and appropriate religious, moral, aesthetic and physical education; own cultural development and personal life also require such an extensive training [2, p. 13].

One of the determining factors of preserving ethnic and cultural identity of foreign Ukrainian is schooling, a system of national education, which gives not only knowledge of the native language, but also provides a national-patriotic education. The use of native language in a foreign environment has a positive effect on national self-preservation. Kindergartens which function in many countries where Ukrainians reside prove to be an important part of education that lays the ground for the child's harmonious development, contributes to the preservation of national traditions, language and culture.

Objective: To analyze the pre-school training and preschool children education as factors of preserving ethnic identity of foreign Ukrainians in the U.S. and Canada, to prove that the working methods and programs of such educational institutions contribute to the overall development of the child and serve as a basis for national and spiritual upbringing of the younger generation in conditions of the ethnic community.

Guidelines Coverage. According to Edward Zharsky education is an essential matter of all Ukrainian community in the Diaspora, it is its main problem. Kindergarten teachers, teachers as representatives of Ukrainian community, which commissioned the care of their greatest wealth - the younger generation, children - have an honorable duty to achieve this goal for both the child's good and for the good of the Ukrainian nation and humanity. The educator's task is facilitated by the fact that the child in preschool or school age is very susceptible to the teacher's influence. To a large extent, educators, Ukrainian studies teachers and counselors of youth organizations have the future of the child and the Ukrainian community in their hands [2, p. 13 -14].

Ukrainians considered the goal of Ukrainian educational system in the U.S. and Canada to be in educating of full-fledged Ukrainian person who in a new country of residence, not only because of loyalty, but feeling love for the newly acquired motherland, will also love the country of his origin and will not get rid of the value of the Ukrainian [4, p. 18]. As the child age, especially preschool age is the period when all the basics are founded, it should not be missed either in the terms of training, or primarily in the terms of education. Of course, this is not an easy task, but it is quite possible to implement if the parents who bring up the children born already in a new country are aware that they and their children are part of the Ukrainian nation. In those families where Ukrainian is a natural and constantly used language, Ukrainian book is used and native customs are preserved, knowledge of native gives some sense of pride, spiritual wealth and support.

Of course, family always plays a crucial role in a child's upbringing. The role of parents in this process can not be compared with any most prestigious educative institutions. Mother and father lay a basis for their children upbringing without even knowing it by their daily demeanor, communication with close relatives or friends. However, in the Diaspora, not all

families can give the child a proper education in the national spirit taking into consideration the ethnic heritage of cultures. Over time, it gets "too tight" for a child to be in the "parents' nest", it requires a wider range of communication and seeks to communicate with peers. In this case preschool educational institution is a good opportunity.

In our case (we consider the period from the middle of the XXth century), Ukrainian immigrants were forced to leave their native Ukrainian land for various reasons (economic, political, etc.) and settle in the vacant lands of the United States and Canada. In such circumstances, working day by day in a strange land not only men but also women and mothers were busy. Immigrants of the second and third waves actually felt that they began to lose the younger generation actively included into the society of the country of residence. It was the system of native language training and education, which involve children from preschool age and up to youth organizations which could prevent this process. Thus, it is clear that there was a great need to create places where children were under twenty-four-hour care. Ukrainian schools were opened long before 50-ies of the XXth century. For the smallest children they began to create children's "svitlychka" ("front room") - small groups of children combined by age capabilities. Thus, Ukrainian children "svitlychka" was the basis of Ukrainian educational system [4, p.18]. The Ukrainian National Women's League of America (UNWLA) has taken this honorable responsibility - educating of Ukrainian person since 1952. Ukrainian mother could take her child there from the age of three to urge her child to make friends with other children as an equal, to learn who they are, to get the sense of belonging to the Ukrainian people and independence, to develop God-given abilities by studying native language.

It should be noted that the UNWLA is one of the components of WFUWO (World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations); this federation was founded in 1948 in Philadelphia at the World Congress of Ukrainian Women to unite Ukrainian women by means of their organizations all over the world, to coordinate their work and represent them for their citizens and foreign world, as well as to work for protection of the Ukrainian people.

The awareness of the fact that in the country of settlement a large percentage of the younger generation is losing its identity and dissociates itself from the Ukrainian community, prompted the progressive community to establish a basis on which you can discuss together preschooling problem of

both the first and main stage of external aid to families in education of nationally conscious younger generation. The World Council of Pre-schooling (WCP) became this basis, it was established in 1952 in Toronto to assist the Ukrainian women organizations in this important matter.

It should be emphasized the importance of connecting of educational centers of Ukrainian women organizations in the world with WCP to build Ukrainian preschooling. Irina Pelenska, a head of Pre-schooling Branch in the United States (which is part of the WCP presidium) proves that organizing of "svitlychka" network in the country of residence must be a call of every Ukrainian regional organization care of its each branch. Ukrainian organized womenfolk must take responsibility for creating the foundation of national education. "Joint forces will facilitate to solve a difficult issue of network and daily work of Ukrainian pre-school institutions in the countries of residence" [5, p. 19].

It is a fact that today already the fourth - fifth generation of the people who once, in the late XIX - early XX century immigrated in search of a better life reside in the U.S. and Canada. It is quite natural that assimilation processes take place here. Today the question of child maintenance in Ukrainian preschool sharply rose like 50-60 years ago. And again the Ukrainian women's organizations took responsibility for such an important matter in the countries of settlement.

The main educational factor that has a crucial impact on the spirituality of the young generation is home Ukrainian family, early childhood education in their native language and culture. Another factor for Ukrainian family is Ukrainian pre-school education, this subtle, sometimes underestimated Ukrainian "svitlychka", organized and managed by Ukrainian women's organizations in the U.S. and Canada.

"... we should keep in mind the goal of our Svitlychka - give a child the Ukrainian environment where it acquires basic knowledge, national and religious education and ability to get on with the Ukrainian children" [1, p. 11].

"Ukrainian Svitlychka has a special task. By introducing the child into Ukrainian rituals, customs and what is the most important - learning the Ukrainian language, we want to educate a Ukrainian person, conscious of his uniqueness" [3, p. 13].

Therefore, the main goal in preschool institutions where Ukrainian children often come without the

knowledge of their mother tongue, to teach children to speak Ukrainian; enable them to learn and explore its basic laws, learn to understand the language, to express their thoughts, feelings, help to get Ukrainian studies education, learn Ukrainian culture.

Today the most important national duty of all Ukrainians in the free world and women's organizations in particular is saving young people, holding them in their own nation, and together with that maintenance and development of Ukrainian preschool education is coming [5, p.19].

To achieve this goal learning the Ukrainian language systematically teaches oral and written expression, introduces the structure and features of the Ukrainian language, arouses interest in reading Ukrainian word as a means of shaping the mind and heart and establishes national identity.

Ukrainian schools in the diaspora pay great attention to the Ukrainian language study, particularly in "svitlychka" and training (preschool) classes where they study Ukrainian poems, songs, riddles, tales, thus enriching preschooler's active vocabulary with Ukrainian words. Only after a preschooler learns the pronunciation of unfamiliar sounds, the basic principles of sentences in Ukrainian he begins exploring other Ukrainian studies subjects.

Analysis of preschools shows that mastery of the native language is primarily of practical character. "Svitlychka" pupils should be able to answer simple questions related to their environment, describe a picture, and count to ten. Children of older groups must say their own story, count to twenty. In the preparatory class pupils should know Ukrainian alphabet, be able to write individual letters, talk on easy topic, to describe an event or class, tell a more complex fairy tale, count to fifty. Classes of literature introduce American and Canadian Ukrainians into a rich national spiritual world of the Ukrainian people. They introduce kids to folklore, poems and short stories by T.Shevchenko, I.Franko, L.Hlibova, L.Ukrainka, N.Zabila, R.Zavadovych. We point out here that the program provides familiarization of children with other nations' folklore translated into Ukrainian. They study tales of Brothers Grimm, Andersen etc, in particular.

The study of history aims to acquaint children with their ancestral past - especially with the Cossack and the princely era, a modern situation of Ukraine, national holidays, origin of the name of the state. It is interesting that six-year-old preschoolers must recognize princes and hetmans of Ukraine in the

portraits, national symbols. Classes in geography help children to create a real image of Ukraine, which natives of Canada and the United States have never seen. Besides teacher's stories maps, drawings, paintings of natural resources, cities, rivers and seas, mountains and steppes, flora and fauna of their homeland are used.

In addition, children learn to recognize works of folk art (embroidery, carving, sculpture, Easter eggs, etc.) to dance, sing folk songs together at lessons of Ukrainian culture.

As you can see, the curriculum of Ukrainian preschool has a clear national meaning, meets children's age characteristics. Its practical implementation requires educators' intense creative work, because the pupils spend no more than 3.5 hours in daily "svitlychka". Thus, training sessions last 2 hours. 70% of time is spent on the study of Ukrainian subjects, and 30% is for acquainting with life and household in the country of residence, for walks and excursions. In kindergarten the national spiritual and civic education of the young generation of Ukrainian Canadians takes place simultaneously, which, according to the organizers of Ukrainian education should grow up true patriots of Ukraine and true citizens of the country where they were born.

Children's svitlychka help parents in national education of children. Ukrainian svitlychka is the first school that gives birth to the sense of belonging to the Ukrainian environment. The child sees that not only he and his family are able to speak Ukrainian. There, in svitlychka, Ukrainian soul, which has its roots at home, continues its formation in the team. In Ukrainian svitlychka children enrich their language, because they hear it in games, poems, entertainments and fairy tales, and Ukrainian language is the basis of the Ukrainian identity preservation. In Ukrainian svitlychka Ukrainian children hear music and study Ukrainian songs, educators turn on Ukrainian songs while children work - music can be heard almost all the time. So when the time comes to sing, the song does not seem so strange, unknown. Even children, who speak poor Ukrainian, love to sing. And music remains with the child, even if she forgets the song lyrics.

The basis of Ukrainian child education is Ukrainian environment. In svitlychka child gets to know Ukrainian prayers, songs, customs and traditions. Child also practices and improves Ukrainian language and meets other Ukrainian children. Svitlychka teaches child to love Ukraine and everything Ukrainian. It helps to hold the Ukrainian "I". What the

child learns to six years, that will be remembered a lifetime [6, p. 12].

Conclusions. Thus, the analysis of the Ukrainian preschool institutions in Canada and the United States gives reason to believe that by its content, principles and methods they promote not only the overall development of the child, but also ensure its entry into the world of the Ukrainian nation, laying the foundations of national and spiritual life in ethnic community.

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