

Robi Kroflič

PERSONAL IDENTITY BETWEEN UNIVERSALITY AND CONTINGENCY (As European do I remain Slovene?)

Social changes in the last decades, described as an age of post-modernity (Lyotard), late modernity (Beck) or liquid modernity (Bauman), already have a big influence on the processes of identity building. When we are seeking for the educational opportunities to empower developmental processes of children's identity, we must recognize and accept these wider cultural changes. We can agree that school and education are social phenomena, which are closely related to concrete social conditions. When these conditions are changing, the meaning of theoretical concepts that form a basis of phenomena is also changing. So basic educational goals and values, that we are already declaring, like democracy, social justice, human rights, dignity of a man, freedom, autonomy, critical thinking, authority, responsibility etc. are getting new dimensions of meaning and so we should at least try to discover this new dimensions and find new methodical ways of education that will integrate these features.

First I will try to describe two paths of cultural changes in Western civilizations that have already shown a big influence to value orientations and identity structures of young people.

The first one can be described as a change of basic personal considerations/expectations of young generations in last decades. Until the modern era the majority of people were seeking for more personal freedom as a basic goal of identity development and value orientation, Z. Bauman and A. Giddens are sure that today's lost of ontological security (Giddens 1991) forces young people to turn their preferences from seeking freedom to security (Bauman 2001), which they try to find in their private sphere of family and friendship relations. This tendency can be recognized as one of the most important causes of a turn in value orientations of young generations from committed political ideals (student movements in late sixties) to personal and post-material values (Jeznik 2006).

The second wave of cultural changes can be seen in the field of moral development theories and practices. If ethical and political theorists from the period of Greek antiquity to Enlightenment period were expressing a tendency to moral subjectivity and to a concept of autonomy, A. MacIntyre (1981) is sure that today we should strengthen again the concept of moral virtues and pro-social motives that evolve as an output of committed personal engagement in local cultural space. Or as we may describe the same vision in a more simple way: the rationalist concept of autonomy turned the personal responsibility of moral agent into a weak concept and if we want to make it stronger (see a description of responsible citizenship as a main goal of European citizenship education, 2005), we should strengthen empathy, committed devotion and active tolerance as important values of authentic identity of men.

Let's see how these two tendencies of cultural and theoretical changes interfere with two philosophical problems: the relation between autonomy and authenticity and between universality and contingency.

I.

A political historian Pockock describes the rise of a modern concept of citizen as an autonomous person with human dignity and political rights as an output of a long evolution from "political being" (Aristotle) to "legal being" (Roman jurist Gaius). So a citizen meant someone "free to act by law, free to ask and expect the law protection, a citizen of such and such a legal community of such and such a legal standing in that community." (Pockock 1995, pp. 35-36) In that supposition Kovač-Šebart and Krek (2005) argue for thesis, that human rights constitute a concept that over-determines the notion of citizen and citizenship education. A concept of citizen on the one hand describes man's seeking for freedom and on the other hand presupposes his/her moral development and the basis of his/her identity as a "zoon politicon". In a period of Enlightenment,

the moral subject gets an ontological status (as Kantian autonomous subject) and concrete legal protection (in the first charts of human rights).

But according to many theorists, this western narrative of humanization of the mankind contains some negative features and we should become aware of that in the period of late modernity:

- The faith to universal rationality (Descartes) as a basis of human morality and political concepts (Kant) produces radically a negative relation to the otherness as a form of insanity, which is according to the metaphor of a "leper" excluded from the community to special institutions – "Hôpitaux" (Foucault 1973, Kroflič 2006).
- Reduction of human morality to the universal rational law also means "forgiveness" of another important concept of man's identity, authenticity, which is built in a strong connection of a person with private relations in family and friendship communities, and produces personal sense of meaning and variety of different personal competencies, which were in traditional language described as virtues. For MacIntyre, Sandel, Cooper, Callan etc., virtues are constitutive elements of human morality and identity (Kroflič 2005)!
- If autonomy was still a strong moral and political concept in the era of modernity where it presupposed the living in a unitarian national state with common religious faith to the same moral values, it is becoming weaker and weaker in a globalised world of differences (idem).

By means of Nietzsche's criticism of the Enlightenment's optimism, David E. Cooper highlights two assumptions of Kant's ethics that he believes contemporary liberal theoreticians are not well aware of: "The two theses are that the autonomous self is a noumenal one to be distinguished from the empirical self of desire, inclination, and the like; and that the laws which an autonomous person legislates for himself are those binding upon all rational beings as such – hence (universal, R. K.'s note) laws of reason. If these two theses are rejected, rational justification of autonomy becomes obscure." (Cooper 1998, p. 65) And according to Callan, a monolithic culture of ratio as a uniform model of human connecting can simply no longer be advocated in the period of late modernity as "the project of finding a justification for autonomy that command a wide and stable consensus may not be feasible under cultural circumstances where indifference toward serious ethical distinctions is widespread" (Callan 1998, p. 90). Simply said, while Kant's autonomous subject was able to successfully operate in a stable, nationally and worldview-wise monolithic society built on a homogenous set of values and a uniform model of rational treatment of ethical issues, life in late modernity is characterised by the disintegration of the stability of the social context and thus the stable identity of the individual (Berger 1983, p. 178). So "the new cultural circumstances, most easily described with the terms globalisation and multiculturalism, require the formation of a stable social environment while taking into account an individual's dignity (idem, p. 181), regardless of his culturally-dependent value and intellectual orientation, not supported by Kant's uniform criterion of morality. In late European modernity, the universal concept of justice is becoming exhausted, which is shown by the pile of present problems with the integration of immigrants facing a rigid understanding of the Enlightenment's ideals of equality, brotherhood and freedom leading to inter-cultural and inter-religious struggles in France, Germany, the Netherlands etc." (Kroflič 2005, p. 25)

Theoretical emphasis on the contingent concept of authenticity that arose at the beginning of postmodern era, was therefore an urgent element of the turn in theoretical field and it was strongly connected with the critique of modern conception of men's identity and political concept of modern state. In my opinion it was not connected only with a critique of a faith to monolithic and universal truth, but it can be also connected with concrete transformations of life patterns at the break of the nineteenth and the twentieth century. It was a period of arising movements of youth culture ("birds of passage" movement in Germany) that ended the illusion of a unified culture and identity. Until that period young people were seeking for authentic way of living and critical reflection of the values of older generations. And what is more important, a contingent culture of differences becomes a life space in which new patterns of identity are arising. That's why

Slovenian social psychologist Nastran-Ule claims: "It is about the choice of identity, not the individual's inevitable destiny arising from his or her national, social, racial or ethnic origin, gender or age. The identity of the individual is seen as increasingly unstable, unclear and changeable *network of partial identities*, which fits well in the presently unstable, unclear and changeable social circumstances. We can assume that the more the world community will show its global, impersonal character, the more transitional and conditional all local links between the individual and the surrounding society will be." (Ule Nastran 2000, p. 314, see also Kroflič 2005 a)

Although it seems that the universal concept of autonomy and the contingent concept of authenticity are competing concepts of morality and identity, last decades show that what we are seeking as a solid ground for constructive patterns of identity is not an or-either solution, but a way of combining universal and contingent element of our identity. In the 1960s theoreticians began to recognise the dangers of the concept of authenticity. While the concept of autonomy established a historically appropriate construction of the subject suiting the period of the initial accumulation of capital, it seems that the value of authenticity is increasingly becoming the socially-suited concept of the consumer society, the consequence of which is a new socially-desired type and libidinal structure of the individual. Adorno's study *Jargon of Authenticity*, Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Society*, Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism*, Taylor's *Malaise of Modernity*, Giddens' *The Transformation of Intimacy*, and Bruckner's *The Temptation of Innocence (Essay on the Duty of Happiness)* are just some of the titles enabling the establishment of the hypothesis that the culture of authenticity is merely the back side of the cult of internality – a concept of autonomy, which is suitable for the values of consumer society. To step out of this dangerous process, according to Strike it is urgent to search for the solution in the balance of the authentic virtues and formation of a proper reflexive tool: "Autonomy depends not only on critical capacity, but also on virtue. Virtues may be shaped in communities that are formed in pursuit of some evaluative framework. While studying the subjects provided by liberal arts education may abet autonomy, it does not secure it. Such studies need to be conducted in a community that takes the virtues associated with autonomy and the rule of reason seriously" (Strike 2003, p. 187).

Strike supports the significance of community and its values with two more important arguments. The positive argument is based on the claim that the rationality on which autonomy is based has a local nature, while the 'essence' of ethical life should be searched for in the private and particular, therefore, any attempt to universalise a personal view is connected with an illegitimate desire for domination (Strike 1998, p. 82). This means that a task of the public school is to provide the conditions for a common search for an 'overlapping consensus', enabling the particularly marginalised groups in pluralistic society to participate in the search for a common language of making agreements (idem, p. 99). This idea is also supported by the negative argument, that the main enemy of accepting the common frameworks of living in school and society is the exclusion and feeling of alienation (Strike 2005), or as the same thought that was formed by Dürkheim, social anomie (Kroflič 2005 a).

II.

We have already started to think about theoretical frameworks for building an educational concept that would reflect described features of society and identity changes in last decades. It becomes obvious that the relation between universality and contingency is one of the main dilemmas of contemporary educational concepts and it should have influence on the content of different educational factors, from which I will try to outline basic features of community, teacher and peers as an objects of identification, art as an important part of humanistic education and the use of new technologies – especially internet, which creates new cultural spaces for young generations.

Basic ideas for the construction of a *school community* can be extrapolated from dialectical relation between community and identity, brilliantly described by Bauman: "Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain... (But) 'identity' means standing out: being different, and through that difference unique – and so the search for identity cannot but divide and

separate... Identity sprouts on the graveyard of communities, but flourishes thanks to the promise of a resurrection of the dead.” (Bauman 2001, pp. 15-16) Developing identity is a process which can be stimulated only in the community (element of security), but on the other hand it is a process that forces it's agent to separate himself from that field, enabling it's growth (element of freedom). It is a serious game of seeking for a balance between freedom and security, because “promoting security always calls for the sacrifice of freedom”, while “freedom without security equals being abandoned and lost”. (Ibid., p. 20)

Accepting Bauman's ideas, we are searching for principles and content of *school as an inclusive community*, which is promoting an overlapping consensus about common values, rights, regulations and responsibility (element of universality), but which also promotes contingent part of searching for and developing individual features of personal culture, meaning of life and authentic virtues (element of contingency). A community that enables a secure negotiation between particular habits and common ground of shared values.

Another important educational factor is *the person of the teacher* with other possible objects of identification between adults and peers in a school community. He should not play a classic role of “representative of traditional social roles of majority culture”, but he should promote a *role of active tolerance* to the participants of variety of contingent cultures. There are at least two important warnings about the forming of the role of a teacher – student and peer relations in the post-modern era that arouse from the critique of Enlightenment anthropology. The first one is that the teacher should abandon the role of Kantian ‘unencumbered autonomous self’ and promote empathic and committed relationships to the other, if he wants to promote tolerant and responsible behaviour of pupils through identification (Kroflič 2005). And the second one is that teachers should be aware of “the error of seeing the other as their *alter ego*, therefore ‘... the other deserves my respect because of his or her rationality, his or her capability of being an autonomous person like myself,’ and not, as pointed out by Chaliier, because of ‘the otherness of the other’ (Chaliier 2002, p. 68). With Levinas, the face of the other as different, the recognition of the value of his or her authentic life position becomes some kind of ethical remedy for the vanity of the modern autonomous subject, and also for the modern assimilation-based society, whose justice and democracy should be judged foremostly through its attitude to the marginalised social groups and individuals.” (Kroflič 2006, p. 35)

If we reflect these two fact, that *art* was for centuries one of the centres of humanist education, and *music* is one of the basic factors of identity building of subcultures of young generations in the twentieth century, citizenship education should use this channel of communication with younger generations to recognize and promote contingent and universal element of their identity. In the words of Kratsborn and Kramer: “Music is an (authentic, R. K.'s note) interplay of autonomy and contingency. ‘Autonomy is about universality and the sublime transcendence of specific meaning. Contingency is about historical concreteness and the intelligible production of specific meaning’ (Kramer 2003) (Kratsborn 2005). Thus art, and music especially, is a sense-opener, enabling the critical treatment of reality, is an ideal means of communication and a media of connecting cultures, and simultaneously strengthens an individual's reflexive consciousness” (Kroflič 2005, pp. 32-33). In the interplay between contingency and universality, we should stress out an important feature of music as ‘cross-over’ between contingent parts of specific sub-cultural or national cultural patterns and universal patterns of contemporary world music (Kratsborn 2005). The popularity of world music between young people (this year we celebrate in Ljubljana twenty two years of an international music festival called ‘The other music’, see <http://www.drugagodba.si/>) is the best proof that intercultural orientation could be and is already a strong part of the authentic element of identity of at least some parts of the young generation.

The last important educational factor I would like to stress out, are *new technologies as artificial community spaces* that are used by young people as a meeting point for different cultural exchanges. Of course we should be aware of possible negative impacts of technologies, amongst which I would like to stress out Žižek's neologism ‘inter-passivity’ and widened appraisal that computers and TV's are producing ‘alienation in a virtual world’. But we should also acknowledge

that young people are transforming the use of computer technology as a productive tool of their culture. So public school that wants to reach a contingent element of the identity of young people should, should integrate their way of productive use of IT (for example 'blog building praxis' and program 'soulseek' for exchanging music archives and experiences as tools of new sharing communities) as a possible educative factor.

III.

The four educational factors that I've described in the last chapter, are also the basic elements of the project *European multiple choice identity*: inclusive community and teacher attitude (sensitive to all kinds of sexual, race, national, cultural and also cognitive differences, stressed out in a Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences), use of art and IT are recognized as promising productive tools of identity development and promoting pro-social behavioural patterns of children and young people.

At the end we turn our attention to the subtitle of this paper and try to answer the question: as European do I remain Slovene? We see that rejecting of the classic Enlightenment's model of individual and community, we must also reject the assimilation model of building a social part of identity. First, because it has already lost it's legal strength when we take the logic of human rights serious. And second, because it has also lost it's moral strength. So, cultivating the contingent part of our identity and the active promotion of national and other particular cultural identities together with building strong reflective tools for a search of overlapping consensus should be the path to a strong European identity. That's why I believe that as a European, I should remain Slovene!

Literature:

- Bauman, Z. (2001). *Community (Seeking Safety in an Insecure World)*. Polity Press, Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Berger, P. (1983). On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor. *Revisions. Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame. pp. 172-181.
- Callan, E. (1998). Autonomy and education. *Philosophy of Education. Major themes in the Analytic Tradition. Volume II. Education and human being*. ed. by P. H. Hirst and P. White. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 68-93.
- Citizenship Education at School in Europe* (2005). Brussels: Eurydice.
- Cooper, D. E. (1998). Authenticity, life and liberal education. *Philosophy of Education. Major Themes in the Analytic Tradition. Volume II. Education and human being*. ed. by P. H. Hirst and P. White. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 32-67.
- Foucault, M. (1973). *Madness & Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Jeznik, K. (2006). Interchange Between the Development of Society, Individual Identity of Adolescents and Public School System. *First European Research Student Conference and Doctoral Workshop. New Researchers for the New Europe*. Riga 2006 (in print).
- Kratsborn, W. (2005). *Music makes sense. Seven ways to give meaning to music*. Gröningen (in print).
- Kovač-Šebart, M. and Krek, J. (2005). Moral Education and Citizenship Education: Can They be Separated? *Contemporary Pedagogy*, vol. 56 (122), no. 5, Ljubljana 2005. pp. 36-60.
- Kroflič, R. (2005). Is Autonomy still an Acceptable Education and Socialisation Goal of Public Education? *Contemporary Pedagogy*, vol. 56 (122), no. 5, Ljubljana 2005. pp. 18-35.
- Kroflič, R. (2005 a). New concepts of authority and civic education. *Teaching Citizenship (Proceedings of the seventh Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network)*. A CICE publication: London 2005, pp. 25-34.
- Kroflič, R. (2006). Kako udomačiti drugačnost? (Tri metafore drugačnosti v evropski duhovni tradiciji),

- Sodobna pedagogika – Posebna izdaja (Upoštevanje drugačnosti – korak k šoli enakih možnosti)*, Ljubljana 2006, str. 26-39.
- MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After Virtue (Second Edition)*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press.
- Pockock, J. G. A. (1995). The Ideal of Citizenship Since Classical Times. In: *Theorizing Citizenship*. ed. R. Beiner. State University of New York Press: Albany.
- Strike, K. A. (1998). On the construction of public speech: pluralism and public reason. *Philosophy of Education. Major Themes in the Analytic Tradition. Volume III. Society and education*. ed. by P. H. Hirst and P. White. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 79-106.
- Strike, K. A. (2003). Toward a liberal conception of school communities (Community and the autonomy argument). *Theory and Research in Education*. vol. 1 (2). London: Sage Publications. pp. 171-193.
- Strike, K. A. (2005). The Chief Enemy of Discipline in Alienation. Belonging is its Cure (An interview, leaded by R. Kroflič). *Contemporary Pedagogy*, vol. 56 (122), no. 5, Ljubljana 2005. pp. 8-17.
- Ule Nastran, M. (2000). *Sodobne identitete – V vrtincu diskurzov. (Contemporary Identities – In the Whirligig of Discourses)*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče