

# Informal education of youth and inclusive environment

**Mārīte Kravale, Vija Guseva**

Daugavpils University  
Faculty of Education and Management  
Parades 1, Daugavpils, LV-5400 Latvia  
E-mail address: psg@dau.lv ; marit@inbox.lv

*Changes in the social environment, in individual and societal behaviour, in family relationships and job market have also transformed youth perception about the variety. It is essential to study the experience and the attitude of youth to help them to develop more tolerant attitude towards the otherness and to foster understanding among people.*

*The aim of the article is to study the attitude of youth towards people with special needs. This leads to a conclusion that it is essential to develop societal opinion about the otherness.*

**Key words:** *inclusive environment, informal education, tolerance.*

## Introduction

The changes in the social environment, individual and societal behaviour, in the family relations and in the labour market have affected the young people as well. As the white Book of the European Commission "New Impulse to Europe's Youth" admits (European Communities, 2002), distrust to institutional structures is observed among the youth. Youth grows up in the society, which is open to cultural and economic influence from the outside. Young people are connected with the whole world and they do not hesitate to use the products which characterize globalization. At the same time, they reject definite manifestations of globalization because they do not correspond to the principles of social justice, accessibility, and "sustainable" development. This document also states that "our task is to provide such conditions that in this plural-

istic society in Europe the youth would feel and behave as responsible and tolerant citizens". This position of the European Commission points out that the youth should be observed and perceived as a force, which can help to form Europe, but not as a problem to be dealt with. At present, changes take place in the sphere of education of young people in Latvia. The state centre of Youth Initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science has worked out the strategy of action for several years. The Ministry of Family Affairs has joined the development of the project of the state programme of youth policy for 2005-2009 as well. However, little research is being carried out about the youth as a subject, experience, and attitude towards the other. To reveal and to go deep into the problems of youth, it is necessary to find out their experience and to understand their attitude towards the other. The common aspects of

the youth's informal education and inclusive environment help to reveal the deep-rooted prejudices and the necessity of tolerance.

The aim of the article is to introduce the results of the research on the youth experience and attitude towards people with special needs accepting tolerance in relations.

The article offers the explanation of the concepts, research methodology, and the main conclusions.

Youth can be characterized as a group of people who become independent society members and get ready to take an active part in the social life. Every day in press the youth is reprimanded for their indifference, individualism or for exaggerated form of expression, though often it is exactly the youth who actualize the existing problems in society like inability or lack of wish to accept the other. Dialogue philosophy is one of the most important philosophies, which deal with accepting the otherness and with the formation of community. V. Schmidt (Šmits, 1991) analyses E. Levinas' works and indicates the possible consequences that can be caused by the denial to think about the other. Admitting the other is a precondition of peace. The examples of this are to be found in the whole world and in Latvia, too. The concept of "alien", but not the understanding of the otherness, is dominating. M. Kule and R. Kulis (Kūle M. & Kūlis R., 1996) accept the ideas of German philosopher K. Jaspers who draws attention to communication as the veritable form of human existence. Traditions and authorities are of a great importance on the level of social groups. Rather frequently, some viewpoint is accepted only because the majority thinks so. Here there is a hidden danger of imposing identical unified understanding upon everybody without waiting for a natural mutually correcting agreement. Fully identical unified under-

standing does not correspond to the human nature. If the society tries to unify everything too intensively, the opposite process appears – not understanding, but unmotivated protest, not community, but estrangement.

With the growth of understanding, one can form either a thinking model "we exclude the others", i.e. segregation as a norm, or a thinking model "we learn together", i.e. any "otherness" is interpreted as a norm in the world diversity, but not its deviation (Berziņa, 2005). Studying the informal education of youth it is important to reveal its contents. The education researcher J. Valbis (Valbis, 2003) writes: "... large scale – round understanding of learning allows every person to reveal, show, and discover storage of treasures in each of us." It means that everyday learning and new experience is of vital importance.

There is an understanding that informal education is the main term that means unconscious learning. Informal learning is viewed as opposite to formal learning, it is a way to solve problems with the help of learning – changes in situations, life problems (Karina, Watkins, Victoria J. Marsick, 1992). Informal learning is the basis of non-formal education, therefore each individual needs self-development. Each individual with his/her notion of space becomes a source of energy for other structures and their qualitative development (Kaznachejev & Spririn, 1988).

Informal education should not be viewed as a means for satisfying basics needs but education in a global context.

Informal education is a lifelong process within which every individual acquires attitude values, skills and knowledge from those effects and resources of education which are in the individual's closest surroundings – from the family and neighbours, from work and play, from the market, library and mass media. Informal education

is like an everlasting process, every person acquires the knowledge, skills, attitude and understanding from the everyday experience in the interaction with the surrounding environment.

The authors consider that informal education is every individual's educational basis, which facing the changes, is perfected in everyday process. The individual's interests, necessity and the surrounding environment determine the contents of informal education (Coombs, 1974).

The understanding of inclusive environment is accentuated by the congress which took place in Glasgow, UK, in 2005 with the slogan "welcoming diversity", i.e. there has already been developed the understanding that practically there are no two children with the identical styles of learning. Chr. Liesen (Switzerland) emphasized at the congress that inclusion is not knowledge, but understanding, as mentioned in the journal "World of Psychology", 2005, issue N10.

Inclusion is a process the aim of which is designing inclusive environment for all children where:

- 1) teachers, students and parents are ready to work together for the development of school in solving different problems;
- 2) where the difference is seen as a resource but not as an obstacle;
- 3) where all children feel accepted (Nimante, 2002).

One of the criteria of inclusive environment is tolerant disposition (Leeber, 2005). Its presence or lack allows to evaluate the environment as inclusive; consequently, as the environment, which, responding to special needs of a child with functional disorders, is ready to change; as the environment where the otherness is viewed as a resource but not as an obstacle, where both peda-

gogues, schoolchildren and parents are ready to work for their own development and for the development of school, as well as for the democratic solution of different problems.

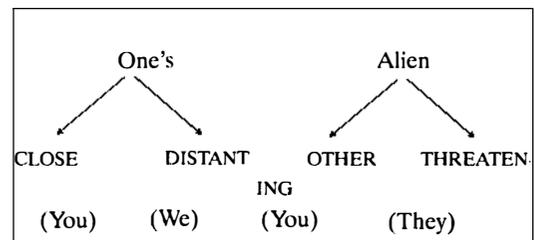
In understanding tolerance, A. Pipere's (Pipere, 2001) view is accepted, stating that tolerance is a complicated individual psychological formation which is dependent on the personality qualities and on the influence of the environment.

Tolerance can be explained as the personality's pro-social behaviour favourable to others and creating positive social consequences, and it can manifest itself as:

1. A positive attitude towards the different ones.
2. An inclination to avoid domination, destruction, or dialectic reconciliation in communication with the different and multiform.

Following the theory of disposition, tolerant and intolerant behaviours can be explained by the fact that on the emotional level the attitude towards other people manifests itself as "the attitude towards one's own" or "the attitude towards the alien".

As one can see in Drawing, "the closest" (positive acceptance- "you") or "a more distant" (neutral attitude - "we") can be in the role of



*Drawing. Kinds of emotional attitude towards other people*

“one’s own”. “The alien” can also be as “the other” (neutral attitude – “you”) or threatening (negative disposition – “they”). In other words, the scale of nontolerant attitude is “the alien-threatening”. Thus, the formation and upbringing of tolerant relations is connected with the transformation of the attitude “the alien- threatening”. At first, it is transformed into the attitude “The alien – the other” and then into the attitude “one’s own-distant-close”.

As it is known, it is possible to change the emotional component of the disposition by influencing the cognitive or behavioural component. From all of the above mentioned, one can conclude that inclusive environment is closely connected with tolerance and the contents of the youth’s informal education form the basis of attitude towards the other as well.

### **Sample of the research and result analysis framework**

187 young people at the age from 13–18 studying at school of general education in Latgale and Vidzeme took part in the research. They were offered a questionnaire with closed and open questions. The answers were received in writing; the received data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively.

The tasks of the research were to clarify the attitude towards the other.

In this article, however, we will mainly analyze the data which reveal the attitude of youth towards people with special needs and tolerance in the relations. Thus, mainly the answers which show the attitude of youth while meeting people with special needs, are taken into consideration in the basis of the analysis.

Statements. The study of the youth’s attitude towards the people with special needs is carried out considering 4 aspects:

1. Kind of attitude.
2. Previous experience.
3. Offering and rendering assistance.
4. Understanding and its formation.

The analysis of the received data on the kinds of attitude testifies to the fact that the youth is open to the new and the different. 86% of the respondents admit that their attitude towards the people with special needs is positive (positive acceptance and neutral attitude – “we”).

14% have negative or exclusive attitude; they mainly emphasize that these people have “limited possibilities of development”, they “will always be more strange” than the others and “smaller requirements are put to them” as well. This attitude appears as a negative disposition – “they”.

Analyzing the data qualitatively, it is possible to determine the deeper reasons of the attitude. The most frequent commentaries were as follows:

- *I feel uncomfortable in their company.*
- *They themselves would feel bad among “the normal ones”.*
- *I don’t know, it makes no difference to me.*

The youth’s previous experience and possibilities of maintaining contact with people with special needs reveal that 33% of the youth have friends or acquaintances who are people with special needs (including classmates), therefore their positive attitude is self-evident.

67% of the youth have not familiar people with special needs, therefore their attitude is individual: positive, neutral or rather negative. It should be admitted that informal education frequently helps a young person to maintain contact with people who are different.

The research also included clarification of such a point as offering help to people with special needs in case of necessity. The results of the

questionnaire give evidence to the fact that 83% would help, however, this requires knowledge. 10% would offer help to anybody who needed it. 4% of the youth would not help, justifying their stand with the fact that this help could seem humiliating to one, the other or to both sides. 3% did not answer.

The questionnaire included questions about understanding, which would help to determine the features of tolerance in points of view and relations. 60% of the youth consider that they have understanding and knowledge about people with special needs. It is interesting that this opinion dominated not only with those young people who have had some previous experience with people with special needs. 32% of the youth admit that they have no idea of the problems of people with special needs, because they have not had any interrelation with such people, there is no interrelation with such people, there is no information or they are not interested in this. 8% of the respondents did not know or did not answer this question.

To widen the youth's understanding of the people with special needs, the following question was asked: Would the attitude in the society change, if there were more information about people with special needs?

The received data show that 50% of the youth admit that information would help to accept and understand these people's needs better, but this information should be accessible, easily and quickly perceptible and understandable. The point of view of some young person is "As for as I know, local governments help then."

On the other hand, almost 42% of the youth admit that attitude is not connected with information. The attitude is formed gradually: "If people got to know each other closer, the reserved attitude, as well as fear, would disappear."

8% of the youth did not answer this question.

The analysis of attitude of youth was evaluated according to 4 criteria: kinds of experience, previous experience, help, and understanding. Experience forms positive attitude towards people with special needs. Youth who have positive relations with people with special needs are more tolerant.

## Conclusion

Having studied and analyzed the theoretical literature and documents, one should admit that youth is a changeable group which forms its attitude towards the processes and phenomena taking place in society on the basis of their searches and experience. People with special needs live in the society, but their existence and well-being largely depend on our attitude.

The inclusive environment and actualization of tolerance would also facilitate the formation of deeper understanding.

The data of the research testify to the fact that 86% of the youth at the age from 13 to 18 have a positive attitude and 33% have experience with people with special needs. These data prove the necessity to actualize the diversity and to help every young person in revealing the value of qualitative in everybody.

As 42% admit, the attitude is not always connected with information. This conclusion is valuable in the work with the youth, because information without any example and contents is senseless.

The youth should understand the problems of diversity, instead of being satisfied with some acquired ideas and thoughts. It would be essential to help youth to understand the other. Inclusive environment is the first step to help people with special needs to live in such an environment.

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## NEFORMALUS JAUNIMO UGDYMAS IR PALANKI APLINKA

### Mārīte Kravale, Vija Guseva

#### Santrauka

Socialinēs aplinkos, individualaus ir socialinio elgesio pokyčiai, nauji šeimos santykiai bei darbo rinka daro didelį poveikį jaunimo pažiūroms ir gyvenimo įvairovės suvokimui. Todėl yra būtina tirti jaunuolių pažiūrų kaitą, siekiant padėti jiems būti tolerantiškesniems *kitokiam* bei ugdyti bendravimo su įvairiais žmonėmis supratimą.

Šiame straipsnyje apžvelgiama informatyvaus mokymosi samprata ir paskirtis, palankios aplinkos samprata bei ypatumai. Būtent palanki aplinka sudaro galimybes bendrauti ir bendradarbiauti skirtingiems žmonėms. Tokią pozityvią visų žmonių atžvilgiu aplinką galima sukurti tik vadovaujantis tolerancijos principu. Pristatomas jaunimo (13–18 metų) pažiūrų

tyrimas, ypač pabrėžiant jaunimo požiūrį į neįgalius asmenis. Tyrimas atliktas keturiais aspektais: pažiūrų rūšis, turima patirtis, pagalbos siūlymas, supratimas ir jo formavimas. Tyrimas parodė, kad dauguma jaunuolių išreiškė pozityvų požiūrį į neįgalius asmenis, tačiau tik trečdalis jų turėjo susitikimo su tokiais žmonėmis patirties. Taip pat tyrimas atskleidė, kad dauguma jaunuolių mažai informuoti apie negalios žmones, taigi jų pažiūros dažniausiai nepagrįstos nei informacija, nei patirtimi. Tai sąlygoja nepakankamai palanki aplinka.

Palanki aplinka yra pirmasis žingsnis siekiant suartinti skirtingus žmones ir ypač įtraukti į bendruomenę neįgaliuosius.

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