

MULTICULTURALISM IN EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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The development of communication technology is extremely rapid. One of its most noticeable consequences that affects the whole world is called 'Globalization'. Due to globalization the interconnectivity between continents, countries and people, has become so intense that the seemingly solid boundaries between them have become fuzzy. Internet, this global telecommunication system, has made us able to find out everything about each other, including each other's culture with its material, social and intellectual values. Migration results in mixing genera and nations. As a result, the number of bilingual people increases. Globalization affects the areas of culture and education but multiculturalism and interculturalism are still lagging behind. Further openness may be coded in the familiarization of different cultures, habits and traditions. The task of the schools is to transfer culture. This should be further emphasized, especially in ethnically mixed environments.

Keywords: multiculturalism, intercultural education, intercultural competence, tolerance

In the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, which is a northern province of the Republic of Serbia, there is a long tradition of multicultural education. *Vojvodina is a multiethnic and multicultural area in Serbia, with various religions, there are almost 30 communities of national minority, which is nearly 35 % of the total population in the province.* There are 6 official languages. In addition to the Serbian language, which is the official language of the country, Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak, Ruthenian and Croatian are spoken as well. Throughout the country citizens can use their native languages. In education, too, at all levels of the educational system (from preschool to higher), young people acquire education in their native language. In fact, students attend classes together in the same building, socializing by meeting with the culture, traditions and customs of others. Minorities who are not educated in their language have a possibility to develop their native language in a certain number of hours per week. Those languages are Macedonian, Bulgarian, Romany and Bunjevac.

As a special way of education in Serbia there are bilingual groups in preschool institutions in the following combinations: Serbian-Hungarian, Serbian-Slovak, Serbian-Romanian, Serbian-Croatian and Serbian-German-Hungarian. There are settlements in which lessons are conducted in 3 or even 4 languages.

„Based on the comparative analysis of education subsystems in some countries of Europe with national minorities' mother tongues as languages of instruction, the author tries to single out those components which seem acceptable in the case of the Republic of Serbia. The author suggests four models: „A“ model, with the whole teaching process in a minority's mother tongue, „B“ model, with a minority's mother tongue as a language of instruction in the case of the so-called “national subjects“ (a minority's mother tongue, history, geography, art and music), „C“ model, where the whole teaching process is carried out in the majority's mother tongue, in addition to classes of mother tongue and literature as an optional subject, and „D“ model, where the whole teaching process is carried out in the majority's mother tongue, with the mother tongue with elements of national culture as an optional subject“ (European..., 2006:135).

In recent years great attention has been paid to the *education of Roma children* following the principle of *inclusion*. This paper will show the programs to ensure the intercultural education of children in the autonomous province of Vojvodina and the Republic of Serbia.

Key issues

Culture. Culture includes the full-scale society heritage of a given group of people. It covers the group's or society's models of social scientific reasoning, emotions and actions, and the financial expression of these models. The word culture originates from the Latin word 'colere'. Its original meaning is to settle down, to educate, to defend and to honour. Anthropologists call all phenomena culture that are in connection with Genus Homo. When we talk about culture, we need to refer to intercultural links. Differences in cultures of different groups draw our attention to the fact that a number of different cultures exists.

Multiculturalism. This concept refers to ethnic, religious and linguistic differences. Differences between cultures make the existence of other cultures explicit.

Interculturalism. Refers to the interlocking of different cultures, the interaction and communication between cultures. It includes respecting other cultures and the exchange of cultural resources in the spirit of tolerance. The notion of multiculturalism with respect to the situation in a given country refers to the fact that within the country a number of groups with different cultures live together. Interculturalism takes a step further, and suggests that communities with different cultures not only live next to each other, but live together.

Multicultural and intercultural education. What is multicultural education? Banks and Banks (2001) define the essence of multicultural education:

“Multicultural education is the Education of the defined area in which the main objective of equal educational opportunities for the various human race, ethnic and cultural groups, different gender and social class students is met. One of the most important objectives for all students is to help in acquiring knowledge, attitudes, and skills, which in a pluralistic, democratic society needs to function effectively and that the interaction between people from different groups, the successful operation of the communication will help to ensure that the society and the morale of all for the benefit of serving the common good” (Torgyik, 2004:4-14).

Education does not only serve as a basis of individual development, but it refers to the improvement of the whole society.

The process of education adheres this development by considering multiculturalism of the society and by systematically facilitating the improvement of interculturalism through a number of well defined tasks. Among many, these tasks help youth to be able to communicate with their peers in different cultures, and to be tolerant with other cultures and to get rid of their prejudices.

Developing intercultural competence

One of the most important tasks of multicultural education is to develop multicultural competence in students. The elements of the process are listed below:

1. Developing the awareness of pertaining to a given culture.
2. Developing the awareness of how our own culture affects us.
3. Intellectual openness towards different perspectives, opinions, habits and traditions.
4. Overriding 'ethnocentrism', i.e. the knowledge that there is no place for overestimating our own culture or undervaluing other cultures.

School plays a central role in realizing these tasks, as well as in resisting prejudice, discrimination and intolerance. But school on its own cannot be responsible for these - responsibility is divided within school, family and the community as a whole.

School education in Serbia has progressed in this direction with the introduction of the school subject Civic Education into the curriculum, and with the organization of workgroups where students may find out more about civil values, with special focus on equality and human rights.

Further training of teachers for intercultural education

It is most important for those teachers who live and work in a nationally mixed environments. The most important elements of the development of competence are:

- The promotion of behaviour models that include different cultures - models that are typical of the school and the environment where students live in a culturally mixed community.
- Supporting communication between groups of different cultures.

It is also compulsory for the teacher to get to know the unique properties of the community, its habits and traditions. This way he may be able to support students' positive perspectives towards different cultures through their own example.

Tolerance

"The third element in architectural structure of culture of peace, according to natural matter, is TOLERANCE. Really, like peace, one of concepts of tragic destiny! Without education and pedagogy for tolerance, as civilization relation towards opposite points of view, nothing can be done to make world of peace like the way to man" (Bubanja, 2005).

The most important issue related to tolerance is how to react to perspectives that differ from our own - especially if we are convinced that

our view is correct. Solving this problem depends on the size of the gap between the different views.

Tolerance does not require the equivalence of views; neither does it require accepting behavioural patterns that are unacceptable.

Being tolerant is about accepting differences and accepting being different. We understand that others have the same rights related to their existence, development, and the use of their culture, language, habits and traditions.

Tolerance is positive thinking. It is a sign of tolerance if a person or a group can accept people who differ in some way. Tolerance is an important source of empathy. Students must learn how to empathize with others' problems. Empathy is the highest phase of tolerance.

Goals are:

- Education for accepting differences /the best example is to employ teachers of different nationality and first language in the day-board/
- Education for mutual respect
- Education for common life /which includes the acceptance of different cultural models/
- Solving conflicts /if solving is ethnically based, the same rights and obligation must be referred to/
- Education for mutual tolerance
- Getting rid of prejudice related to others' habits and traditions

This may be achieved by learning about each others' habits and traditions, since the normal schooling system segregates students based on the language of education. But in the day-boards students are not segregated. If there is a possibility, it might help if the two teachers of the day-board come from different ethnic backgrounds. This way students do not need to be segregated even at learning times. Ethnical division should not be allowed /e.g. Serbians play against Slovaks/.

Involving the parents in achieving these goals is also important, since in a number of cases students acquire their prejudices and intolerance at home.

A general code of tolerant behaviour should be compiled and accepted by the parents.

In order to achieve these goals it is important that the atmosphere of the day-board is democratic. This way students may be able to accept common values.

Consolidated lifestyle

Ordered lifestyle has a number of positive consequences. Family, friends, development, good relationships, love, tolerance, common experiences are all important factors in achieving order.

It is important that teachers /best if teachers of different ethnic groups work together - as referred to earlier/ behave as models. This is the only way to show children how to behave.

Proper self-regulation is also a basic requirement of consolidated behaviour.

Goals:

- Preparation of students for ordered life
- Presentation of a positive model
- Proper use of free time

- Respecting family, friends /and everyone - not only from our own ethnic group/
- The acquisition of proper behavioural patterns
- Learning each others' language
- Developing self-control

Personality development is planned in both day-boards and schools in a number of different areas of education:

1. Ethical education:
 - Learning about the basic ethical values. It is important that the teachers of the day-board transfer a collectively elaborated system of values that does not differentiate between students
2. Intellectual education:
 - Improving intellectual abilities, improving the ability to acquire information independently
 - Learning about the surrounding natural environment and society
3. Education of communication and interpersonal relationships:
 - Learning about rules of living together
 - Acknowledging the importance of human relationships and the ability of co-operation. Teaching about civilized behaviour and civilized interpersonal communication.

Communication problems are mostly due to the inability to use either the official or the environmental language. That is the reason for the voluntary day-board segregation of children who are segregated in education.

In the day-board there is a greater chance for the students to get close to each other, since all activities (except for individual learning) are collective - students can be motivated collectively. These activities may include sports, free time activities, environment reserving activities, etc. Language differences may not be considered as obstacles, since those may serve as the starting point of mutual learning.

This is really important for the mixed day-board groups. As the first step students should acquire basic civilized and tolerant behavioural patterns, and then they may learn about each other's languages, customs, and traditions, as well as the famous people and most important feasts of their respective cultures.

Serbia, a multicultural country

Serbia is an multicultural society where a number of different nations live within the borders – based on the 2002 census. (According to the 2002. census the population are – without the Province of Kosovo and Metohia: 82.86% Serbs, Hungarians 3.91%, Bosnians 1.44%, Roma 0.94%, 0.94% Croats, Albanians 0.82%, 0.79% Slovaks, Vlachs 0.53%, Romanians 0.46%, Bulgarians and others 0.27%)

Earlier there were no widely accepted theories about interculturalism, the dialogue between different ethnic groups and cultures. Except for the autonomous territory of Vojvodina where there has been a successful model of coexistence of different ethnicities for decades.

Events of the past /wars of the last decade of the 20th century in the area of the former Yugoslavia/ contributed to the drifting apart of different ethnic groups and the alienation of the relationship between them. Groups of young people segregated. Not knowing habits and traditions of others is still a problem, just like the false interpretations or misstatements of their own history.

The transition period - in which Serbia has been pretty long now, with a number of social and economic problems - has evoked a number of ethnic conflicts that seemingly lack reason.

The first step has been to include specific issues of different cultures in the curriculum. These include for example texts by writers of different minorities.

Additional results of intercultural education include education in the mother tongue of the minority, and teaching the language of the minority to members of the majority in the environment.

The official language of education is Serbian, though in regions where ethnic minorities live there is a possibility of education in the first language - at any stage of education. This way in pre-schools, primary and high-schools /partially in higher education/ the language of teaching is Albanian, Hungarian, Slovakian, Rumanian, Rutenian and Croatian. Development of first language within school context is available in Bulgarian, Romany and (since recently) Bosnian.

National education

This is a very important factor. The environment in which the day-board is located includes the elements of future and past, the elements that are important for all ethnic groups.

All students should be involved. Students learn more about habits and traditions of the other groups /these habits and traditions include their history, folklore, national costumes, music, famous people, literature, events and feasts/.

Learning about other cultures and accepting the national identity of other people and other groups is the primary criterion of developing patriotism.

Special attention must be paid to situations where there used to be hostility between the people who live together now. Students should be educated to process these situations in their historical context, and understand the circumstances that lead to these conflicts. Further affrays should be avoided. Teachers of the day-board should serve as models for solving these problems.

Civic Education

The aim of Civic Education is to make students aware of their rights and obligations without special focus on their nationality, but with special focus on equality. Phenomena and problems of the society should be talked over. Students should be motivated to participate in common activities with maximal tolerance. This may facilitate the understanding that all citizens have the same rights and obligations, and all of them have the right to express their national identities. The interlocking of different cultures makes a country rich and progressing.

Physical education

Physical education is one of the areas where common activities may be organized with great success. For this reason the need for physical education should be expressed.

We should organize sports activities where students are not divided into ethnic teams like Serbians, Hungarians, Rumanians or Slovaks, but where mixed teams are formed. This way ethnic tolerance may be enhanced. This is highly up to the teachers of the day-board whether children express phrases like 'We will defeat the Serbians' and 'We competed with the Slovaks', or there may be no place for these expressions due to the mixed nature of the groups.

Identity confusions should be avoided, since these cause the feeling of not belonging. Students should be helped with forming their identities, just as the integration into both the narrower and broader environment.

Students of Sándor Petőfi Primary School in Becej, Vojvodina, are mostly Roma children living in deep poverty.

Altogether 479 Roma people live in Becej. The Social Centre assigned Sándor Petőfi Primary School with the day-board allocation of the Roma children, since the highest density of Roma people live in the environment of this school. But also other schools offered to take these children. Education started with 6 children from year one and two. The language of education is Serbian, Hungarian and Roma.

In the day-board facilities these children have been given the same possibilities as their peers of other nationalities to participate on equal basis in the life of the institution.

Examples

It has been highlighted in the introduction how multicultural education is organized in the autonomous territory of Vojvodina. In the following section we will introduce a few examples of how intercultural education is realized in Vojvodina. There will be some other examples from different areas of Serbia.

Handbook of Intercultural Education...

Fragment of the developmental program of the Nikola Tesla Primary School in Banatsko Karadjordjevo. The program is entitled 'Our Richness is Coded in Diversity'.

Primary aims and needs. Priorities of the school:

1. Developing culture and tradition. Learning about the cultural particularities of students of different ethnic groups /Serbian, Hungarian, Romany/
2. Getting acquainted with each other in different school subjects with activities and contents outside schools.
3. Improving school atmosphere by increasing humanity and empathy and by organizing programs for children in need.
4. Further education of teachers with modern, up to date methods and work forms in accordance with students' needs.

Developmental goals:

1. Developing tradition and culture: the exchange of cultural values between Hungarian /Torda, Vojvodina/, Roma /Torda and Cestereg, Vojvodina/ and Serbian people /Banatsko Karadjordjevo and Cestereg/. This contributes to the intellectual, cultural and educational personality development of students.
2. Due to the religious and cultural particularities of the Hungarian population it would be important that the national customs and traditions may be developed in all three schools.
3. Extra-curricula activities outside school with traditional and cultural elements.
 - a. Fine arts: Analysing national embroidery, national costumes and tapestry.
 - b. Analysing the Roma language poem entitled 'The Gypsy Praises His Horse'.
 - c. Analysing the poem entitled 'Gypsy Skylark' in the context of Roma lifestyle.
 - d. The population of Serbia - processing the issue of ethnic minorities.
 - e. Music competition: original variations of the music of different cultures.
 - f. National costumes of Serbia
 - g. Processing the issue of national traditions
4. Improving affiliation to the given culture, education for respect, tolerance and acceptance of each other.

Activities:

1. Common ceremonies, individual feasts of the three populations, similarities, differences
2. Exhibition and market of arts and crafts made by students
3. Meeting students of other schools
4. Forming workgroups /embroidery, ethno/
5. Sports competitions
6. Printing school newspapers in three languages

Socialization of students at day-boards and full-day schools in environments with mixed nationalities

This practice is most important, since students are segregated during the time of education, but in the day-boards they are mixed for a longer period of time.

Learning about and affirming the Roma culture in Nis

A strategy entitled 'Equal Opportunities in Secondary Education' was introduced in the Filip Kljajic Secondary School in Nis, Central Serbia. Apart from the further education of teachers, the strategy involves school-plans and programmes for both children and their parents.

After a preparatory period the school realized the strategy. This strategy focused on the familiarization and acceptance of Roma culture.

- The issue of Roma culture has been processed within the curriculum of Civic education
- Students listened to Roma music during the lessons of Music education
- Students learnt Roma dances during Physical education
- Objects of a Roma and Serbian national costume exhibition were prepared by the students at the Textile technology education. Object included drawings and clothes. All objects were prepared based on photos. The photos have also been exhibited.
- Throughout the programme workgroups are organized. Within the workgroups students talk about prejudice and conflicts.

Summary

Looking at the achievements of 20th century, many people are convinced that this century has produced more discoveries and progress of mankind than ever before. Owing to great achievements in technology, spreading of information and development of all other sciences, people of different languages, cultures, religions, have been connected in societies with different social systems. Such changes are most prominent in the Old Continent, Europe, due to unification and the opening, migration of unprecedented proportions. This sequence of events has caused, in a very short time, mixing of cultures at their material, social and spiritual levels. Such mixing has resulted, on the one hand, in the emergence of multiethnic societies, while, on the other hand, the permeation of different cultures has led to the emergence of multiculturalism, i.e. the coexistence of people from different cultures (with different customs, traditions and habits). Moreover, there is the need of preserving own national identity by preserving the language, customs and traditions, that will allow each nation to contribute to the spread of multiculturalism, as a category essential for coexistence in the spirit of tolerance and peace.

Apart from permeation of different cultures (especially in areas which are shared by people with different cultures, creating multicultural environments), the development of information and communication technologies has enabled cooperation and linking of cultures that are physically not linked (i.e. they are geographically far away from each other), resulting in natural introduction and adoption of other cultures, customs and traditions. These are examples of interculturalism, which also requires the said procedures of application (tolerance, etc.)

As regards the Republic of Serbia, it has significant historical experience in developing and fostering multi-and interculturalism. In the decades immediately after World War II, when Serbia was in the borders of Yugoslavia, it was often mentioned as an example of resolving the status issues of various ethnic groups, and its northern province of Vojvodina, in particular, had the leading role in fostering multiethnicity and multiculturalism.

Unfortunately, the events during the last decade of the 20th century (break down of Yugoslavia and wars in this region) for a short period led to disturbances in this sphere. After the democratic changes in 2000, Serbia has invested great efforts to restore the previous state and preserve the previously achieved results.

Educational institutions have been very active in contributing to the above objectives. In many regions in Serbia educational institutions provide bilingual and multilingual instruction, and in all regions they provide the subject of Civic Education, organize a number of common activities on multicultural and intercultural bases, introduce inclusive education, primarily for Roma children, and share the responsibility and obligation to further preserve and develop multiculturalism and interculturalism in the Republic of Serbia.

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