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INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION FOR INTEGRATED EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract:

This paper is a brief description of the current developments in the educational system in the country and the need reform it. In terms of inter-ethnic relations in education, more prominent is the need for its interethnic integration. One of the ways to save and overcome the misunderstandings, and the integration of this system is seen precisely in the intercultural education that acknowledges and respects diversity and supports diversity or diversity in all areas of human life. That kind of education makes the students sensitive to the idea that people have naturally developed a different way of life, customs, traditions, values and worldview. The intercultural education tends to overcome the passive coexistence and to create a developed and sustainable way of living in a multicultural society as ours. This kind of upbringing and education should build individuals with intercultural competences who are capable of living and working in a multicultural environment. Hence, by analysing the advantages, principles, objectives and principles of intercultural education we will point out its necessity and a suitable way for introducing it into the curriculum, with the aim of improving and integrating the inter-ethnicity in the educational system, where it is most necessary and would give productive results in terms of building a healthy, stable and prosperous society.

Keywords: multiculturalism, inter-culturalism, integration, educational system reform.

Introduction

In our multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-confessional country, Republic of Macedonia, the segregation has been present in the educational system for years with the aim to avoid the conflicts among the members from the different ethnic groups.

The integration and the inclusion in the educational process represents a big challenge which has to help create a larger mutual familiarization of the communities. However, the educational system suffered a segregation that was latently supported in order to avoid the conflicts among the members of different ethnic groups. The result of this segregation were the deepened differences and the enclosing on a private terrains on one hand, and a strengthened stereotypes and prejudices of both major ethnic groups in Macedonia on the other hand.

The integrated education or the educational system, that enables, nourishes and supports the inclusion and the interculturality among its members, represents one of the basic preconditions for the development of the social cohesion and the democratic principles in the multicultural societies. Because of this, this kind of an integrated education is more than needed. It will directly influence the keeping of the peace and the stability of the country, by protecting the human rights. Consequently, the countries have the obligation to provide a participation and the guarantee the equal possibilities for the participation of all minorities into the economic, politic and social life of the society. “The integration in its essence refers to fulfilling the responsibilities carried out by the sovereignty, it also includes respecting the human rights and providing a good and an effective conduct, and is closely related to the total stability of each pluralistic society” (Guidelines from Ljubljana for the integration of the different societies with an explanation, 2012, p.3).

The first step in Macedonia concerning the integrated education happened in 2008, when the High Commissar for minority questions of OBSE gave specific recommendations for the integration through the education to the Ministry of Education and Sciences of Republic of Macedonia. The recommendations emphasized that the integrated education doesn’t end with putting up the children from different ethnic groups in a classroom. The integration means “a democratic and decentralized conduct of the schools; interesting and inclusive textbooks; activities outside the school and the depoliticization of the teaching curriculum and the textbooks”. In january 2010, the High Commissar of OBSE, the Ministry of Education and Science and OBSE produced the strategical document “Steps toward an integrated education in the educational system of Macedonia” (2010). The aim was to include clear and drastic changes in the general approach

in the educational system concerning the multi-ethnic reality in the society. This document represents a key point in view of the measures connected to the integrated education. The measures estimated by the strategy projected reforms and activities in five spheres of activity:

- an integration through activity of the students outside the lecturing;
- an increase of the mutual understanding of the languages for the students and the adults;
- an adjustment of the teaching plans, programs and textbooks (with a special emphasis on the history, geography and language textbooks, as well as the introduction of the subject for the History of religions);
- training of teachers for conducting the inter-ethnic questions;
- the management of the schools in a decentralized context (Steps toward an integrated education in the educational system of R.M, 2010).

However it is necessary to note that the Strategy is mostly focused on the role of the Elementary and the High education in the processes for the increase of the social cohesion among the culturally different groups, while the document doesn't ascribe any role to the High education as a factor for an integrated education. This data is worrying that if you have in mind that the ethnic segregation in the High education can undermine the positive effects achieved in Elementary and in High school. The problem with the role of the High education in the Macedonian multi-ethnic society has appeared as a result of the broad context of the multi-ethnic relations, and especially as a problem with the approach to the higher education of the minority groups.

The four components of the Strategy are based on the three **principles of UNESCO for an intercultural education¹**:

- (1) The intercultural education respects the cultural identity of the one that studies through the statute of the culturally appropriate and responsible education for all.
- (2) The intercultural education obtains for each student knowledge about the culture, the behaviour and the skills that are needed for a complete and active participation in the society.
- (3) The intercultural education obtains for each student knowledge about the culture, the behaviour and the skills that enable them to contribute to the respect, the understanding and the solidarity among the individuals, the ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups or nations.

¹ UNESCO (2006), Guidelines on Intercultural Education. p. 32

The strategy is also based on the five principles or dimensions of the multicultural education according to Dr. James A. Banks.

1. **The integration of content** is done by representing the different cultures, communities, religions and other social groups through the changes in the teaching curriculum. This means that the teachers who teach different subjects can find ways to incorporate different cultural elements in their subjects. These possibilities are present in some subjects. For example the language teachers, the art teachers and the teachers of other social subjects can find a range of possibilities for the representation of different cultures, compared to a teacher of physics where the only possibility would probably be the representation of some famous physicist from another ethnic community.
2. The process of constructing the knowledge prepares the students to become more critical of the way the knowledge is represented. For example, the scientific racism or the Eurocentric view of the “discovery” of America. This chiefly means that the students with the help of the teachers are prepared to research the different cultural perspectives, and with that to understand the different cultures. In this way, by the construction of the knowledge, the children will understand better what the scientists wanted to say with the phrase “Western civilization”, which hides many presuppositions and values. They read and think critically.
3. **The decrease of the prejudices** – it describes lessons and activities which the teachers teach and conduct so that they accept the positive picture of ethnic communities and to approve the intergroup relations. This is mostly because of the fact that the prejudices are easily transmitted from adults to children, and the role of the teacher is to be sensitive to the reality that prejudices exist.
4. The pedagogy of equity refers to the modification of the teaching style of teachers and their approach toward the study and the academic achievements of all students regardless of their membership. The teachers help in students’ personal achievements, if they change their style of knowledge transfer. For example, for the Math teacher it is not very important to represent a significant mathematician from another culture, as it is important for that teacher to adapt the style and the teaching techniques by understanding that a member of certain ethnic community can learn the multiplication table better when in a group. This

means that by increasing the pedagogy repertoire, the teacher increases the range of the group of students.

5. The encouragement of the school culture describes a situation in which are researched the school culture and the organization of the teaching staff, with the aim of reconstructing the institutional practices and to create a better approach for its students. This dimension speaks more of equity in a broader sense, the unreasonable and the unconscious racism, for example when choosing a class president, a student that belongs to multiculturalism is always over voted regardless of student's ambitions and desires to become a president. This discouragement is an example of negative culture and negative practice.

Banks ascribes an equal importance to all of the five dimensions.

Multicultural and intercultural education

In any democratic society, one of the key aims of education is the advancement of community's democracy. The educational system has to consider the multicultural character of the society and tends to actively contribute to a peaceful coexistence and positive interaction among the two concepts of a multicultural and intercultural education.

- the multicultural education tries to enable the acceptance or at least tolerance toward the other cultures through learning about other cultures.
- the intercultural education aims to overcome the passive coexistence and to achieve a developed and sustainable way of living in a multicultural society.

That is achieved by: creating understanding, mutual respect and dialogue among the different ethnic groups of culture, obtaining equal possibilities and fighting against discrimination. The intercultural education according to F.Uele² tries to promote and develop the following:

- better understanding of the cultures in the contemporary society;
- the ability to communicate with people from other cultures;
- more flexible behavior toward the cultural diversity in the society;

² Ouellet, F. (1991) L'Education interculturelle – essays sur conteu de la formation des maitres. Paris: Editions L'Hartmattan – Taken from: Mrse S., Petrovic D. Gosovic R. Jerotojevic M, (2007) Interkulturalno Obrazovanje I Razumevanje. Beograd: Grupa Most. p. 5.

- greater readiness of the people to actively include themselves in the social interaction in the other cultural environments and identify the basic characteristics of the human nature as something in common. The intercultural education is a process in which it is necessary that each one of us knows about ourselves and our culture, in order to be able to understand the other cultures. This process is very challenging and includes work over very deeply rooted beliefs for what is good and what is bad, and to examine the personal view on the world and the life. All of the things that we take for granted in the intercultural study leads to questioning and critical thinking. The intercultural study is a challenge for both the personal and the group identity, but it can become a way of enriching the identity. The intercultural study is a process through which we learn how to live in the world of variety, and because of that it is the starting point for a communal life and peace. The multicultural education can help the society to be more tolerant, more inclusive and righteous and to be able to recognize that it is rich with many components.

The difference between the two terms is in the active and the passive treatment of the culture diversity. While one of the concepts only promotes, the other creates possibilities for an active interaction through strengthening the awareness of the real needs and benefits from the interculturalism. The intercultural education presupposes that there are skills and knowledge among the people that motivate the curiosity for learning about other cultures, and consequently the readiness for a mutual respect of the other cultures.

From the definition of an intercultural education, it can be concluded that for a good intercultural education you need to have an intercultural competences which are defined as: and ability to recognize and use the cultural differences as a learning resource (Berthoin – Atal and Friedman, 2003). The key elements of an intercultural competence are: **(1)** being aware of yourself as a complex creature, **(2)** being aware of the influence of culture over our way of thinking and behaving, **(3)** an ability to engage others and ourselves in a research of the suppositions that influence our behaviour, **(4)** an openness to test the different views, ways of thinking and solving the problems³.

The ability to act productively in a multicultural context is not developed only intuitively. It has to be learnt. The education is not only a representation of the living environment and the society in

³ Mrse S., Petrovic D. Gosovic R. Jerotojevic M, (2007) Interkulturalno Obrazovanje I Razumevanje. Beograd: Grupa Most. p. 5.

which it develops, but also influences the development of this environment, and because of this the school has an important role in the development of the multicultural society. It cannot be expected from the education to be responsible for the fight against the prejudices, the discrimination and the intolerance and to provide a successful promotion and development of the intercultural competences of the citizens of a certain community. However, the education can have and should have a very important role in the creation and the support for the development of the intercultural skills, values and abilities needed for the life in a multicultural community as ours. In order to achieve this, it is of essential importance that the school enters in a program of elements that will eliminate the ethnocentrism and/or the hierarchical picture of the culture, and to objectively and respectfully accept the characteristics of the different cultures that cohabit in the frameworks of certain specific areas. Besides, it is necessary to provide a connection and an intercultural education for the democratic citizens. If the activities of the intercultural education are being conducted and much attention is not paid on the participation of democracy in the life of the community nor to the needs of the different cultures, it will create a risk that the intercultural education is based only on folklore, customs, monuments etc.

It is noted that the education and the school should constantly examine their own role. It happens that they even transmit and strengthen the current stereotypes and prejudices compared to the other groups and cultures. When we create a constructive engagement and communication among all of the actors of the educational process, the misunderstandings and the intolerance of differences will decrease, so that the school and the education become an important factor for a harmonic development of a multicultural society.

The intercultural education seeks the inclusion of different perspectives and views (multi-perspectives). A good example for achieving the development of inclusion is the teaching curriculum which includes the languages, the history and the cultures of the minorities in the society. It is necessary to obtain concepts, themes and questions from different angles and cultural perspectives to the students.

For a society to become multicultural, each social groups had to live in equal conditions regardless of their culture, style of life or origin. This means that we need to be aware of how we enter into an interaction to cultures which are different than ours, but also how we enter into an interaction with minorities such as homosexuals or people with special needs (who face various forms of

intolerance and discrimination). In this context the aims of the multicultural study are the following:

- to note the variety is the basis for equality, and not an excuse for marginalization;
- to make an effort to recognize the different cultural identities and to promote the respect toward the minorities;
- the conflicts should be resolved in a peaceful manner.

The intercultural education has to be present in all the levels of society. It is impossible to dream about a multicultural society, but to work only with one of the included sides whether it is the minority or the majority group.

Conclusion:

In the end, we can conclude that the positive dimensions, aims and principles of the intercultural education can help in the creation of a stable and progressive multicultural society in which everyone can find their place on the labour market. Also, it will help create a humane, successful and complex individual and a more cohesive society. The multicultural or the intercultural education has a very important role in creating an integrated educational system that will strengthen the feeling of community, belonging, identity and safety in a multicultural context of a society as ours.

The integrated education doesn't differentiate between school and society, study and life, knowledge and goodness. By respecting the ethnic and the cultural differences, we can help close the gap between the democratic ideals and the social practices. These practices are not very often discriminatory toward the members of the ethnic and cultural groups, and it is more than evident that the need for an intercultural education is more than needed in our society. The contribution of the international organizations in the field of the intercultural education, but the institutions from the central and the local authorities can create concrete policies and programs more studiously with the aim to create an interaction among the students from different ethnic groups.

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