

Roles and Responsibilities of Teaching Staff in Promoting Interculturalism

Roxana Constanța ENACHE¹,
Ana-Maria Aurelia PETRESCU²,
Camelia STĂICULESCU³, Alina
CRIȘAN⁴

¹ Technical University of Civil Engineering
Bucharest, Romania,
rocatare@yahoo.com

² Valahia University Targoviste, Romania,
anapetrescu2007@yahoo.com

³ The University of Economic Studies
Bucharest, Romania.

⁴ University of Agricultural Sciences and
Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca,
Romania.

Abstract: Education can, without a doubt, be a long-term solution to the problems of a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. From a place of defensiveness seclusion and separation, schools can evolve towards a place of openness and communication. From an instrument of assimilation and strengthening of nationalistic characteristics, school can become a tool for the formation of young people, with respect for cultural diversity.

In this paper we want to identify the elements of intercultural education existing in the curriculum of the Romanian education and the way in which interculturality can be promoted as a European competence.

Intercultural communication as a trainer's competence should be considered as a priority both from the point of view of European standards and at national level. Therefore, the professors' concerns should focus primarily on encouraging behaviors, attitudes and values so as to cause the individual to react desirably to fear, anxiety, curiosity, labeling, ethnocentrism etc.; the development of implicit or explicit hierarchical relations between groups and their impact on communication; on exercising the students' competences to perceive time and space, the rapport between them, the system of values and beliefs, the way of feeling and thinking, the types of behavior, that is, the entire habitus that each individual accomplishes by socializing in the determined cultural environment ; on the development of identity strategies that participants put into practice to defend themselves against destabilization, to affirm their own identity, to integrate in the group, to make a positive image, to differentiate themselves, to individualize.

Keywords: *interculturalism; intercultural education; European competence; curriculum documents.*

How to cite: Enache, R.C., Petrescu, A.M.A., Staiculescu, C., & Crisan, A. (2019). From Resilience to Wellbeing at School among Romanian Students. Examining the Role of Social-Economic Status. *Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 11(1), 31-40.

<https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/94>

1. Introduction

Faced with the particularly complex problems of today's Romanian society, more and more people see intercultural education as an essential part of the solution. The Romanian society as a whole has gradually become more and more aware of its own cultural diversity over the last decade and, moreover, many believe that this cultural diversity is not a fatality, a curse of history, but an opportunity, a treasure that should be harnessed for the general benefit. The latter view is entertained by those who generally support intercultural education as essential, first of all for the stability of society and its chances of sustainable development, because it teaches us how to live with each other but also because it promotes equality, respect and openness to communication with the "other". (Băran-Pescaru, 2008, p. 21)

Culture, a fundamental element of universal spirituality, can be interpreted as an ensemble of myths, values, norms, customs and traditions, patterns of action, behaviors and attitudes. These elements manifest themselves in the relationships between members of a society or a social group, though also between them and members of other socio-cultural groups. Culture allows these people to live together. Being a dynamic phenomenon, culture is constantly rebuilding, capitalizing on the experience of each generation and even subgroups belonging to the same socio-cultural communities. Speaking about interculturality, it is the discipline that aims at non-violent and non-oriented communication between people or groups belonging to different cultures. It has its own ethics, that of intercultural communication, which implies respect for universal human rights, starting from the premise of equality between people in the process of intercultural communication, regardless of the actual conditions in which this process takes place. (*Compass - A manual on Human Rights ...*, 2002)

Today's school must cultivate the idea of a spiritualized humanity in which all citizens occupy an equal position throughout an uninterrupted process of social acceptance. Talking about school, the first thought goes to the main process within its framework, education. Education is mainly an activity of transmission and dissemination of culture. Therefore, thanks to education, culture spreads from generation to generation, enriching and diversifying continuously. By modeling the personalities that integrate into, activate and work as part of groups, organizations, communities, institutions, and components of society, education has become an all-encompassing phenomenon present in the finest articulations of society, a permanent dimension of life. The connections between society and the educational

system are formed and developed in both directions, education exercising multiple influences on society through its functions, and society determining its content and functions through its institutions. (Cace (coord.), 2007)

Innovation in education and school is a stringent necessity and a premise for the affirmation of the educational society and can be defined as a measurable, deliberate and sustainable improvement, resulting from the initiation, acceptance and propagation of change. It is a deliberate and well-grounded innovation, suggested by means of the development of scientific pedagogical research. New education forces the school to cultivate authentic universal values by achieving four objectives: taking into account the cultural dimension of development, affirming and enhancing cultural identities, enhancing students' participation in cultural life, and promoting international cultural cooperation. Consequently, curricula have been correlated with the diversity of cultures and cultural interactions, therefore promoting a new mentality that illustrates the fact that the development of society reflects two dimensions: culture and education. (*Compass - A manual on Human Rights Education with young people*, 2002).

2. Interculturality - European Competence

As of late, in the context of the recent integration of our country within the European Union, increased emphasis is placed in the Romanian education on intercultural education. Intercultural education aims at developing more of an education for all in the spirit of recognizing the differences that exist within the same society, and less an education for different cultures, which would involve a certain staticism and isolation of cultural groups. An education designed from an intercultural perspective will resemble the relationships between school and other educational spaces; it will go beyond school walls, prolonging and insinuating into informal activities. By accepting principles such as tolerance, mutual respect, equality, or complementarity of values, the school will exploit spiritual differences and local values, attaching them to the general values of the community.

Formal intercultural education includes initiatives that are developed within the school system; school is, after the family, the main socializing agent, through which students not only acquire an academic education, but also learn a lot about their own cultural code. Without the active support of the school, efforts to introduce intercultural education are meant to see their results diminished, if not completely failed. Intercultural education develops the pedagogy of inter-human relationships. It aims to help students define themselves at any moment in relation to others, trying to give them the

means by which they can diversify their references and experience the different cultural ways in their daily lives. Intercultural education trains students to communicate, even in conflict situations, when relationships are not the easiest.

Intercultural communication as a trainer's competence should be considered as a priority. Here are some issues the teacher's attention focuses on:

- the emotional and socio-cognitive processes towards otherness: fear, concern, curiosity, attraction, categorization, attribution, ethnocentrism etc.;
- the implicit or explicit hierarchical relations between groups and their impact on communication;
- the cultural base of personality: the connection between space and time, the system of values and beliefs, the way of feeling and thinking, the types of behavior, that is the whole habitus that each individual realizes through socialization in the determined cultural environment;
- the identity strategies that participants put into practice to defend themselves against destabilization, to affirm their own identity, to integrate in the group, to make a positive image, to differentiate themselves, to individualize. In other words, the interactive strategies training participants put into practice to communicate or avoid communication with others (Dasen, Perregaux, & Rey, 1999).

The task of today's school is to make students develop a European consciousness. Even in primary classes, it is necessary to cultivate respect, solidarity with the culture of other peoples. Some key values need to be found either in curricula or as part of the educational processes: aspirations for democracy, respect for human rights, children's rights, social justice, ecological balance, tolerance and peace, cultural traditions etc. Therefore, by accepting principles such as tolerance, mutual respect, equality, or complementarity of values, school will exploit spiritual differences and local values, attaching them to the general values of humanity.

The topics related to interculturality, multiculturalism, inter-ethnic relations etc. are topics of general interest for the Romanian society, materialized in a heterogeneous mix of public and private opinions, prejudices, political affirmations and speeches, emotional outbursts, truths with scientific pretensions. To this amalgam adds the fact that the differences between the common and the scientific language used in the discussions on these topics are sometimes minimal, which generates enormous communication difficulties. (Cucuș, 2000)

Also, it is obvious that all those who discuss these topics academically or not, refer to one and the same reality. And it can be proved with statistical data that the Romanian society is multicultural, if we admit that groups registered as ethnicities are carriers of specific cultures. At the same time, Romanian society is one of discrimination starting from multiculturalism. (Cozma (coord.), 2001)

Informal intercultural education has the same objectives as formal intercultural education, but is differentiated by the available methods and techniques. It is voluntary; it does not have the compulsory character of the school and adapts its content according to the needs of the participants.

The methodology is active and participatory, and the trainer's relationship with the participants is closer knit. Interculturality is a component of daily reality in kindergarten and school.

The entire way of learning is organized from an intercultural perspective, allowing learning through collaboration, communication and not marginalization of children. Opening the school space to the community and its specificity, organizing meetings, trips, festivities with intercultural specifics (but not to the detriment of the majority), aims at achieving the objectives of equalizing chances in education.

School representatives are taught to make efforts to find solutions to the practical supervision of cultural differences in classrooms and pedagogical usefulness to overcome possible obstacles in intercultural dialogue. Successful criteria for achieving intercultural education in school are: openness to another, to a stranger (it obliges us to test our trust in us), the ability to perceive what is foreign to us, accepting the other as another, allowing the experiencing of ambiguous situations (these feelings may constitute the preamble of accepting differences), the favorable ability to experience (exploring different existential modes), banishing the fear of another (in order to better meet the other), the ability to question one's own rules. The way we regard the other is determined by the socio-cultural referential system that transforms our behavior; the more we prove ourselves unable to recognize our own reference system, the more we remain insensitive to others.

The effective ways of achieving interculturality in school are: the simultaneous learning of at least two foreign languages, the diffusion of general-human symbols, the enhancement of values that unite people rather than divide them, the participation of youth in the management of the school community, the integration of schools in twinning European programs, obtaining scholarships abroad for pupils or students; participation

in educational programs along experienced teachers which make experience exchanges.

The way in which students and teachers alike perceive interculturality is related to the study of modern languages, computer use, history, geography, etc., and the activities in which they participate are pleasant and even desired by students because they offer the possibility of communicating with same age people, students with whom they share similar concerns, interests, values. Students are familiar with some knowledge about Europe (culture, civilization, history, geography, politics, economy), European institutions, etc., but their assimilation should be systematic, current, adapted to the young people's knowledge needs. After the debates with teachers and students on the topic of promoting interculturality and applying a questionnaire both to students and to teachers, some of the teachers' answers correlate with the students' answers, in the sense that they also think that the best way of promoting interculturality is through formal education, but there are also non-correlated answers - teachers believe that they systematically follow the promotion of interculturality compared to students who consider that this objective is not pursued in Romanian education.

The transmission of knowledge referring to intercultural education (conceptual approaches) remains very important for the questioned teachers and less important for the development of intercultural consciousness (probably because they do not have clear strategies to achieve this desideratum, they do not understand the functioning mechanisms of the strategies that develop attitudes, values and behaviors in support of the authentic realization of intercultural education). The detailed conclusions regarding the analysis of the teachers' opinions on the promotion of interculturality (both in the initial and continuous teacher training programs), in fact, anticipates some of the constraints and barriers that act in achieving this objective in Romanian education.

3. Research Methodology and Considerations

Through this research, we intended to identify the elements of intercultural education in curriculum documents. The hypothesis for the research was that there is a dependence between the awareness of the need for intercultural education as felt by students and teachers and its inclusion in curricular documents (curricula, analytical programs, content of disciplines, school-based curriculum, lesson plans, planification of learning units, etc.).

The main research method was the secondary analysis of curricular documents and reports on the perceptions of students and teachers on intercultural education.

As it emerges from the analysis of curriculum documents, the teachers' competencies in promoting interculturality are mainly found in disciplines in the curricular areas of Language and Communication and Humans and Society.

At the level of the curriculum we considered the promotion of intercultural education as an objective achieved through the transfer of knowledge (through specific disciplines, in an integrated, interdisciplinary way), the development of intercultural competences (teamwork, language skills) and education in the spirit of the values and norms of intercultural education (tolerance, empathy, etc.). The knowledge that contributes to spreading intercultural education to the new generation is developed by integrating themes related to culture and civilization (especially geography, history, civic education, foreign languages, etc.). With regard to the competencies to be formed, practiced and developed from the perspective of promoting intercultural education, these are - linguistic, creative, managerial, assuming responsibilities, arguing, essentializing, abstracting, using information techniques, technical skills) etc. - as they emerged from the analysis of current analytical programs. Empowering the participating citizens who accept to live in interculturality requires that education cultivates the capacities of cooperation, communication, empathy, tolerance, etc.

From the curricular documents specific to Romanian education, as well as from the analysis of the training situations, the opinions of the students and the teachers show the preoccupation to build and achieve interculturality. From the analysis of the curriculum we find that there are predominant disciplines that can promote the promotion of intercultural education in Romanian education (modern languages, history, geography, science, civic, plastic and music education, some optional subjects, for each curricular area). Within the framework of the curriculum Humans and Society, at the high school level there is the possibility to study some subjects such as Integration into the European Union (OMEN nr.3621 / 13.04.2000), the History of European Culture and Civilization (optionally studied at "Elena Cuza" College, Bucharest) and Hungarian civilization ("Ady Endre" High School, Bucharest). However, the number of hours is higher for subjects such as Romanian Language and Literature, Mathematics, whose framework curriculum predominantly provides the acquisition of purely theoretical knowledge (high-school level with a high degree of

abstraction, very little anchored in practice, with few references to the intercultural context) than the development of competencies or adherence to values specific to intercultural education. In Romanian language and literature the emphasis falls on the placement of currents, literary works and even writers in the European cultural context). In terms of school curricula, there is a concentration of knowledge (in promoting intercultural education) both at the level of reference framework objectives, at the level of content as well as in training activities, in the disciplines of the curriculum Humans and Society. In the curricula of the disciplines included in the Mathematics and Science curricular area, the frequency of both the objectives and the content related to these objectives is significantly reduced. However, objectives are focused on the development of competences specific to intercultural education, but they are not all materialized in training activities (provided by the framework curriculum) and even less of them are actually achieved through classroom educational situations. For the disciplines in the Language and communication curricular area, especially for foreign languages, emphasis is put on the achievement of the European educational objective through activities and training situations that contribute both to the assimilation of knowledge and to the exercise of skills and values.

In all the analyzed framework curricula, elements of intercultural education are found to a greater extent at the level of results, to a lesser extent in content and even less at the level of activities. As regards the promotion of intercultural education in school textbooks in Romania (elaborated between 2015-2017), it can be noticed that the emphasis continues to fall on the transmission of knowledge (both from the analysis of the theoretical contents of the learning units, as well as from the analysis of didactic tasks), especially in disciplines such as: geography, history, civic education, foreign languages. Skill development (linguistics, computer use, problem solving, argumentation, formulation of conclusions, dialogue, critical thinking, etc.) must be done mainly in foreign languages, computer science, mathematics, logic, philosophy, civic education. The transfer of values is a concern less taken into consideration by the authors of books, but this is found especially in the textbooks of disciplines whose content is appropriate (e.g. civic education, philosophy, history). When a textbook is approved, there's a criterion that ensures content, teaching tasks, illustrations, or other elements of the manual does not induce the idea of xenophobia, racism, etc. Even though it has not become a daily concern for the promotion of European values, textbooks do not promote values that contravene to human rights, or values that would prevent the adherence to, promotion of and manifestation of European values.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The teacher has to be trained not only for the management of strictly didactical situations, but also to facilitate the spiritual and cultural permeability of the students. Mere theoretical knowledge of cultural characteristics or differences does not imply the respective teacher has any cultural competence. Knowing another does not necessarily warrant favourable intercultural behaviors. Knowledge is not same as recognition. There are so many people well trained in the culture of others, but who behave lamentably towards the bearers of those values. Therefore, the following roles are desirable:

- to ensure the democratic management of the class or school, in order to allow everyone the opportunity to express themselves, to debate, to take account of another, to assume their responsibilities;
- to give each student the chance to experience different roles, including animator or leader, to get acquainted with different forms of leadership, to perceive and analyze the power relations within the group, institution or society, to detect abuses and to take note of them;
- to watch that languages, cultures, ethical or religious beliefs and the different competences of students are given their well-deserved place in school; to be aware as to what perceptions or attitudes these lean towards, either equality or marginalization;
- to supervise the quality of student interaction; it is known that students are increasingly involved in interactions and the degree of participation depends on the prestige they have in the group; their prestige depends, among others, on their socioeconomic situation, ethnicity, language, physical skills, school results; organizing an education that encourages cooperative learning would ensure an optimal exercise of prestige and reduce inequality in school;
- to control the phenomena of violence; young people with authoritarian tendencies should be treated with understanding and put in a position to collaborate in different circumstances with those towards whom hate or violence is directed;
- for people with special needs, a further understanding is needed to integrate them and put them alongside the normal ones;
- to ensure that the group is open to the outside and to promote an attitude of empathy with members of other groups, be they closer or more distant;
- to extend the collaboration between educators and students' parents or social workers.

Teachers as well as students must become aware that intercultural education is one of the main tools by which individuals and societies are prepared to pay more attention to the cultural dimension of their existence. (Cace (coord.), 2007)

Intercultural education becomes the necessity for a pragmatic choice, for “minorities”, with the purpose of preparing future well-integrated socio-cultural citizens through good choices in their personal lives, as well as for the “majority”, who are preparing for the integration of newcomers into multicultural contexts. (Ciobanu, & Cozărescu (coord.), 2010)

Far from being a simple tolerance towards minorities, with exotic traditions and folklore, intercultural education develops the personal tools of the socio-cultural insertion of newcomers in their adoptive country, under the ethical principles of justice and the guarantee of equal rights for all.

The results of intercultural education need pragmatic coherence and temporal perspective to expand into ways of civic life and social interaction that strengthen the respect for human rights and the responsibility in the exercise of personal liberty.

References

- *** (2002). *Compass - A manual on Human Rights Education with young people*. Council of Europe Publishing. Available at: http://www.european-citizenship.org/repository/1_Compas_HRE_Manual.pdf
- Băran-Pescaru, A. (2008). *Educația interculturală*. Ploiești: Editura Universității Petrol-Gaze.
- Cace, C. (coord.), Stăiculescu, C., Ciobanu, O., Bergmann, M., Barz, P., Rodriguey, C., Ginoves, G.A., Bury, M., Sarlej, A., Szklarz, L., Bury, A. (2007). *Design Intercultural Education at Community Level*, București: Editura ASE.
- Ciobanu, O., Cozărescu, M., (coord.), Cace, C., Dumitru, A.C., Păduraru, M.E., Stăiculescu, C., Stoiculescu, R.E., Ștefan, L.R. (2010). *Comunicare și design intercultural*. București: Editura ASE.
- Cozma, T. (coord.). (2001). *Educația interculturală - ghid pentru formatori*. Iași: Erola.
- Cucoș, C. (2000). *Educația. Dimensiuni culturale și interculturale*. Iași: Polirom.
- Dasen, P., Perregaux, C., & Rey, M. (1999). *Educație interculturală: experiențe, politici, strategii*. Iași: Polirom.