MULTICULTURALISM AS IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC OF CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

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Abstract: The introduction of the multicultural principles in education is a result of common processes of modern societies' democratization, requirements for law and respect of the Human Rights and Liberties, the process of globalization and the economic, technological, and cultural connection among peoples and countries.

Multicultural education presents educational program which does not concern only certain minorities, but it also refers to the social groups as a whole, no matter big or small. It refers to every social group which has distinctive culture and to the disparate relations and attitudes that a group develops toward other peoples' cultures. Some authors point out different models regarding multicultural education in Europe and the USA. Different attitudes towards multiculturalism in Europe and the USA arise from various conditions and situations of minorities.

Along with these distinctions go the disparities in educational policy and attitudes towards multicultural education, values, needs, operationalization, etc. If the 'educational ideal' means formation of new citizen that would live in multicultural society, than 'additional' programs for education of children based on interculturalism and multiculturalism must be created. The subject matters of the 'additional' programs should be incorporated in every general educational subject. Schools should play an important role in encouraging multiculturalism, especially the multinational schools, because they are concrete educational institutions where children are taught proper behavior.

Keywords: Multicultural education, multicultural society, cultural diversities (cultural varieties), native language, schooling educational programs.

1. Introduction

Today many contemporary countries are characterized by multiculturalism (cultural varieties), multilingualism, and different ethnic and confessional views.

Concerning the fact that the population has multiethnic, multireligious and multicultural views, many attempts have been made to coordinate the mutual varieties and the differences connected with the identity of civic and political unity.

Multiculturalism is used both as descriptive and normative term. It refers to the cultural diversities that come from the existence of two or more groups in a society where people's views and practices generate a characteristic sense of a collective identity. As a descriptive term multiculturalism is inevitably reserved for multiplicity of a community which is based on racial, ethnical and linguistic disparities. As a normative term, multiculturalism refers to people's approval of a local multiplicity based either on the Rights of Respect for different cultural groups and their acceptance or on majority's moral and cultural allegations, opinions and views in a society where cultural multiplicity is present. In this context, multiculturalism admits and recognizes the importance of beliefs, convictions, values and the different ways of life. It prompts self-understanding and encourages the sense of someone's belonging somewhere as an individual or in groups with similar opinions.[5]

2. Basic ideas and educational policies for realization of multiculturalism

The advancement of contemporary countries and multiculturalism are linked too with changes in educational politics too. The introduction of multicultural principles in

education is a result of common processes of modern societies' democratization, requirements for law and respect of human rights and liberties, the process of globalization and the economic, technological, and cultural connection among peoples and countries.

An inseparable part of a national identity is culture, i.e. cultural identity. Multiculturalism is a fundamental organic part of every multinational human community appreciating veneration, supporting connection, and cultural independence. The most common social determination of culture is that the refers to an amount of material and spiritual values created by humanity during the history of social general and historical practice, while the origination of nations and their cultural development throughout time gains a characteristic mark of becoming a certain national culture. Every national culture carries its own specifications, but it also contains universal knowledge and values. Without them a national culture becomes provincial, closed and ghetto-like.

A presumption and organic part of every culture and cultural identity is the language spoken within the family and within the framework of certain ethnical groups. Language is nourished, cultivated, learnt, and developed in a family and certain social and cultural institutions as media, newspapers, radio, television, publishing, etc. Linguists cannot fully agree on how many languages there are. Mackey claims that there are from 5000 to 9000 languages in the world. It is well known that during the history, many millennia (up till 1000), passed with the use of only few dozens of written languages. There were only 5 official written languages in Europe for a period of 1000 years. During the end of the 18th century there were only 15, while in the 19th century the number increased up to 30 languages. The process of decolonization led

every new liberated country to ensure legitimacy for its own language or languages. Mackey, Canadian expert on bilingualism, points out that national politics in every modern country seeks to impose 'official language', besides the fact that some of those countries must have more than one language that would carry the attribute 'official'. On the one hand, many different languages are used in some countries and on the other hand, a language can be spoken in many countries. English, French, Spanish, and Arabic are official languages of many nations. It is believed that more than half of the sovereign countries in the world use one of these four languages in the official communication. Besides this fact, all these languages are spoken by millions of other people worldwide.

Due to the greater movement of peoples, today we can use the term 'mutilingual megapolitism'. Not a small number of the biggest world and European cities are already multilingual. It is anticipated that in some cities the languages spoken by minorities can become languages spoken by majority, spreading out of their territorial borders. Mackey states that according to the number of people speaking Puerto Rican the biggest Puerto Rican city is not in Puerto Rico, but in New York. This issue reveals the necessity of establishing and creating multilingual education or, as Mackey puts it, many countries face growing cosmopolitan population in schools.[12]

For many countries in the world multicultural education is a subject of critical thinking. Those countries try to include in their constitutions and educational law the basic ideas about the multicultural education based on United Nation's and UNESCO's official documents.

There are many different modalities for achieving equality and multiculturalism

in education, just as the many distinctive cultures, of numerous ethnical groups and countries. Here, only some of them would be mentioned: education in native language, from primary to university education; other educational activities in native language, bilingual educational work (bilingualism); special programming systems for language and literature, history, geography, music; special programming systems for culture and history of minorities' ancestors; language in social environment; multicultural education based on press, media, radio, television, internet, publishing.

According to Verne, multicultural education presents educational program which does not concern only certain minorities, but it also refers to the social groups as a whole, no matter big or small. It refers to every social group which has distinctive culture and to the disparate relations and attitudes that a group develops toward other peoples' cultures.[14]

With the considerable growth of linguistic disparities, due to the liberation of many countries and peoples and the migration in the second half of the 20th century, the issue of education in native language, regional or some of the world languages was raised.

Concerning this, we should be aware that not a single nation has an absolute monopoly over the others. According to some data, the English language is used in 63 countries, French in 30, Spanish in 29, and Arabic in 27 countries. Some of the Western authors who study education in native language, point out that a serious problem may appear for some of the poorest nations in the world if they are about to imply education strictly in their native language. Many nations in the world are faced with this uncomfortable dilemma. It is a fact that neglecting the native language can result in a loss of cultural marks, but at the same time, confining only to a native language and neglecting the world languages inevitably leads to isolation, and can't be of any interest for the nation. Therefore, even in primary education learning other regional or foreign world language, whenever possible, is very useful. It is well known that in the developed western European countries the English language is spoken as first foreign language.

Bilingualism and bicultural education, as forms of multiculturalism in education unite the two functions of education: on one side, preserving of minorities' identity by adoption of their mother language and culture, and on the other side, efficient adoption of majority's language and culture by integration of minorities in economic and social life in a community. Some authors think that restrictions on the values of the bilingual education bring certain difficulties and slow down adoption of a native language. Others claim that bilingualism contributes only in the multicultural education of certain students who belong to a minority group, or possibly, for children from ethnically mixed marriages. The later authors find multicultural education rarely useful for students who belong to a majority group.

However, there is neither well defined point how multicultural groups should work, nor how far multiculturalism should go considering the positive acceptance of varieties in a community. Some authors suggest different models considering the multicultural education in the United States and Europe. Different attitudes towards multiculturalism in Europe and the USA arise from various conditions and situations of minorities. Along with these distinctions go the disparities in educational policy and attitudes towards multicultural education, values, needs, operationalization, etc.

Schools should play an important role in encouraging multiculturalism,

especially multinational schools, because they are concrete educational institutions where children are taught proper behaviour. At the moment, in most countries, multicultural schooling is something that is allusion-like; however there are also countries in which it is a reality. So, in California every sixth child is born outside the borders of the USA and two thirds of Californian students at home speak a language other than English. One third of children in Serbia at home speak a language other than Serbian.[2]

In terms of student population in the future, schools in Europe and the world will become multinational. The question here is whether schools will support multinational development, or they will increase the problems which exist and will arise as a result from the multicultural regime.

Teachers in California have already expressed their opinions. The schools must turn the different ethnical varieties into educational advantage. Children and teachers can be used as living beings resources for attaining geographical, linguistic, and historical consciousness that maintains many cultures. Schools can develop a wealth of languages being multilingual centers of various national specialties, having diverse contents of libraries, encouraging games during the breaks at school, supporting interschool athletic programs, and presenting different styles of clothing.

This is what should be. But, are those principles currently practiced in the world? The most developed form of education that encourages multiculturalism is exercised in the USA. The present form of this kind of education was built through four stages. The first phase is conducting short courses for ethnic minorities with curriculum about the minorities' origin. In the second stage the courses deal with broader issues concerning ethnic groups.

The third phase is the development of programs that go beyond the focus on ethnic issues. In the fourth stage the schools begin to organize workshops and teaching materials that are more than just an ethnic teaching. This phenomenon appeared under the conclusion that ethnic groups suffer difficult situations, similar to those of other minor social groups (people with special needs, religious groups, etc.).

There are two familiar models of multinational (multicultural) education in Europe. One model is the European School, which issues the European diploma, and its work focuses on Europe as a whole, not upon a single nation. The other model is the so called Foyer Model used in Brussels, which is dedicated to children who are migrants and refugees.

Prentice Baptist and his colleague Karen Hues are proponents of multinational education. According to them, this kind of education should represent the following objectives:

- recognition and acceptance of cultural diversity;
- enhancing the understanding of unique cultural and ethnic heritage;
- promotion of an open program concerning culture which is accessible in all areas;
- adoption of attitudes, skills, and knowledge for better cooperation, work, and functioning with different cultures;
- reduction of racism and discrimination in every layer and area in the organization of a society.

Baptist considers that people and groups go through three-leveled programs for multinational education. Those levels are parallel with the historical phases of development in the American education. Karen Hues developed a program for preschool institutions in Houston in which the young children go through different

multicultural experiences starting with celebrating ethnical celebrations and playing ethnic games. After this phase, the children are exposed to various cultural sources and materials which highlight multinationality. In this way they gain experiences which enable them to express sense of power and positive group identity. Part of this procedure includes materials about prejudice and bias and children learn how to oppose such phenomena. They learn that the cultural diversity is advantage and all the people should appreciate it.

Encouraging multiculturalism in schools can be stimulated also by special programs. Such programs are "Hands Across the Campus" in Los Angeles directed towards humane access to culture. Through the program the students can gain knowledge for their origin, they can understand and learn the role of various cultural, ethnic, racial, and other groups, etc. The program is realized through a variety of methods: press, publishing newspapers, encouraging panel discussions, oral reports, dramatizations, role playing, and so on.

In the Bay area (San Francisco) a program named DARE is developed and its task is facilitation of communication among different ethnic groups, questioning stereotypes, religions, and nations.

The areas that are under a great ethnic tension adopt a program called "Blue and Red Ribbon". The program's task is to create stronger sense of unity in the schools and founding students' managing team for crisis, which will act only as prevention or destroying racial and ethnic arguments.

Taking into consideration the delicacy of the multicultural question education, it is still worked on models and methods for achieving optimal measurement among the general, separate and individual subject maters which are firstly local, national and regional and later continental and world-wide. Some authors represent the

opinion that if the 'educational ideal' means formation of new citizen that would live in multicultural society, than 'additional' programs for education of children based on interculturalism and multiculturalism must be created. The subject matters of the 'additional' programs should be incorporated in every general educational subject. This is in accordance with the recommendations for 'European Dimensions of Education' i.e. it should not be realized as a separate subject, but as a principle in every teaching discipline.

The author M. Bennett suggests development of a well developed model of intercultural intuition through programs and activities in schools. We have to understand, he says, why people behave in an "unusual way" and which are the ways that lead to ethnocentrism and ethno relativism.[4]

An argumentative program designed to function well in schools, incorporated in different subjects and activities should make students aware of cultural diversity and prompt their understanding that every culture has local and international patterns-stereotypes for distinguishing people.

A critical element in the development of intercultural learning is not intended as individual knowledge of other cultures, but as reaching a stage up in the process of the cultural learning, communication and interpersonal relations.

Acceptance of these discrepancies results in a negation of "uncultural" and "unethical" rejection. With the establishment of intercultural differences we can clearly see international and intercultural similarities. Our similarities allow us to find a common standpoint. For instance, when a great number of Americans started to travel to Russia many of them realised that the former enemies 'resemble themselves'.

Experiencing cultural differences both as a kind of perception or expression

help in overcoming segregation and positively influence integration in the ethnicity and group.

For successful realization and complete removal of internal or separatistic access toward culture and education, it is necessary for all the citizens to be able to live together in a common homeland. Besides the educational system and the social culture, the means of mass communication should present much more subject matter and languages concerning all national and linguistic minority groups, in the overall social environment, in order to develop continuously the Balkan, European and world dimensions of multicultural education. Solving the general, special and individual issues about curricula and textbooks in schools' organization of work, really, is not and should not be a universal recipe. Therefore, it should be creatively researched until achieving optimal results, and at the same time continually criticizing and naming every single method on the subject that was proven inadequate.

3. Conclusion

In the context of this elaboration on the topic multiculturalism as an important feature of contemporary education, I assume that the following opinions might be summed up:

- Great number of countries in the world have become multicultural, and in future their number is about to rise.

- Every culture has its own specific characteristics which should be respected as such

- Multiculturalism is potential treasure for every society

- Multiculturalism is not manifested only as a feature of a community, but also at individual level

- In the center of multicultural education must be a person whose basic

personal characteristics are: broad intellectual views developed and realized potentials, autonomy, tolerance, liberty, ability to criticize, and democratic orientation.

- Multiculturalism is not achieved only in schools, but also in family upbringing, by powerful and influential means, mass-media, books, movies and a complete social environment.

- The purpose of multicultural education should be a person with broad views and broad multicultural orientation, someone who can give meaning to individual national and cultural identity, and someone who will appreciate other peoples' cultural varieties and their achievements.

- Multiculturalism, linguistic and cultural pluralism, and multicultural education are important features of the new millennium everywhere in the world. They represent humanity's perspective for future life. This reality and civilizational progress have many followers among the civilized, educated, and humane people.

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