

# MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND THE NEED OF ROMA PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION AND INTEGRATION

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**Abstract.** *In recent years there has been a worsening of the economic situation of most Roma people. There is an impoverishment of most of the population, including the Roma. Failure of having or even keeping a job, reduced social benefits has affected this population. Lack of qualification will bring the Roma people to a more severe exclusion, becoming an even more vulnerable segment than it is at this point. They need to be helped, to be integrated in the new society through various social media policies, and specifically aimed at children and young Roma. Living together means changing and adapting, coming from both sides. Multicultural education is a way of helping them adapt to the world. The role of multicultural education comes in to reduce excessive differences that exist between individuals of different ethnicities and cultures. This article focuses on presenting the methods of multicultural education.*

**Keywords:** Roma people, education, integration, change, new society, multicultural education.

## The status of the Roma Society

In the most general sense, the Roma population occupies a special position. Because they are dispersed throughout Europe and beyond, they don't have their own territory. Despite their ethnicity, visibly different, they are not organized as a political entity of its own. The most visible components of the ethnic specificity of the Roma population are the ways they obtain resources for living and specific lifestyle, which refers to clothing and housing (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993a).

All over the world they are thought as a minority, reason for which they share an imposed identity, often similar, which can be characterized through stigma and

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political and social marginalization. Because of this, they are perceived more or less as a deviant of the society and are submitted to prejudices and discrimination (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993b). Due to marginalization, the Roma people have reached a subordinated position in society, often inferior, humiliating, which can be observed in their living, social and economic conditions.

In many developed countries, the lifestyle perceived as specific for Roma population is seen as incompatible with what is considered to be a normal life and it's even less modern. It feels more like a survival than of a way of life in modern society. It's something that can be tolerated or ignored, but provided this does not disturb too much what is known as a normal social life. As Achim (1998, p.30) says: "being left at the ends of society, the Roma people have always been the reason for the Romanian society not succeeding".

Roma are prone to change, they have a remarkable power of adaptation. However, they are strongly affected by the fact that they don't have a status, or a viable organization.

A big part of the problem is education. Parents often have a negative attitude towards the children's education. Some of them fear that school will alienate the children; therefore they are in no rush to send their offspring to school. On the other hand, they are fully aware of the importance of school. Only a few of the Roma children reach high school and the information they have when the graduate is not correspondent with the years they spent in school. A way of improving this situation is influenced by a few factors: a mother who is educated, a father who is professionally qualified, a proper home and the family income.

Education is a right that every human being has. It is fundamental that each family receives clear information about different ways they can receive education: for their children and for themselves. There is a dependency between the intellectual development of the child and parents' attitudes toward education.

To have a pro education attitude means to accept the child as he/she is, the parents trust the child, they also cooperate in order for the child to succeed academically, the needs of the child are met and he/she is protected of any harm. Authority is used wisely and only to control the behavior of the child when it comes to social fulfilling of duties; the parents motivate the child to do the best they can.

### **Multicultural education**

The role of multicultural and intercultural education comes in to reduce excessive differences that exist between individuals of different ethnicities and cultures. It is impossible to educate only a spirit or another, without taking into account the multicultural social context in which they come from and where the youngsters will return. School is a small social group; it recreates one small scale society as a whole. Naturally, school creates a multicultural universe more or less identical to the macro.

Intercultural education appears before the multicultural as a result of socio-economic phenomena. Intercultural approach in education occurred when it was investigated how immigrants manage to integrate into the society adopted. It assumes that individual interaction with the foster community is actually an interaction between two different cultures, often very little compatible. The emigrant comes from another culture, culture that has formed as an autonomous personality and is forced to assimilate a new culture in order to integrate the socio-cultural. This intercultural approach in education is not only a remedy for school failure registered by the migrant children, but also to strengthen intercultural approach of the teacher.

Socio-cultural integration involves keeping native cultural identity of the individual's identity, so identity is enriched by accepting and internalizing norms and cultural values related to the adoptive society. Integration implies freedom to choose and act and, from another point of view, mutual respect and tolerance.

Multicultural education addresses both to the one that comes from a cultural/ethnic majority, in which case the communication skills, acceptance and exploitation of other cultures to understand the difference as a resource, and the one who comes from a culture/ethnic minority, in the idea for cultural/ethnic search, along with understanding and acceptance of the limitations imposed by the majority. Obviously, we cannot evade the fact that it puts the issue of social integration and linguistic minorities in the majority culture and language. Geneva Gay, in a work that wants an analysis of multicultural education in the United States (Gay, 2000) states that multicultural education involves different things for different people, and that all attempts to conceptualize this form of education share four characteristics:

- All are based on a common set of assumptions;
- It grows outside joint educational concerns;
- They contain joint directions for action;
- They share a desire to make cultural pluralism and ethnic differences integral part of the educational process.

### **Methods for multicultural education**

Finalities of multicultural education have been essentially included in the definitions above. Gay (2000) presents detailed specific objectives. The major objectives are numerous and are grouped according to place of school social context, students, time and interests in several general purposes. These objectives cover all three domains of learning: cognitive, affective and psychomotor and incorporates both intrinsic values and tools of multicultural education. These sets of objectives are: cultural and ethnic "literacy", personality development, multicultural social skills, obtaining basic skills, educational equity and skills for social reform, shaping the cultural ideal for each individual.

#### ***Cultural and ethnic "literacy"***

This objective means:

- Inclusion of cultural pluralism in school curriculum;
- Ensuring the submission of outstanding contributions to the history of the ethno-cultural communities that have been so far deliberately excluded from school curriculum;
- Replacement of inconsistent or distorted information about the above mentioned communities with real and significant information;
- Trying to eliminate social tagging for people who are part of the culture or ethnic minorities and to eliminate restrictions in inter-ethnic and inter-cultural;
- Searching for those moments in history when the two ethnic groups were on "the same boat". This objective is essential to accomplish because most ethnic know little about history, culture and contributions of significant cultural and ethnic groups, it is not enough that students belonging to the majority culture to simply accumulate some information.

### ***Personality development***

It involves the understanding of the role of self, conceptions role, positive expectations for themselves and pride in their own cultural or ethnic identity. The aim is to promote the values of multicultural education as: human dignity, justice, equality, freedom, self-determination, democracy, values that belong to the modern world. What is wanted to be achieved is to educate in the spirit of respect for ethnic pluralism enrichment, to induce students the idea that cultural or ethnic differences are not synonymous with phrases like "poor" or "lower" and making them understand that multiculturalism is a reality that we ought to consider.

### ***Multicultural social competence***

It is important that students learn how to interact and how to understand those who are ethnically or culturally different.

### ***Providing basic skills***

It is a major goal of multicultural education: facilitating the teaching and training of basic skills of ethnic minority students. It's a question of adapting curriculum to students coming from different ethnicity than the majority (teaching methods in mother tongue, textbooks in mother tongue, etc.).

### ***Ability to perform social reform***

This objective assumes that the price of social change starts in school and later extends to the whole society. Changing attitudes about ethnic and cultural minorities must be concepts from school, through multicultural education; students will be trained in the spirit of tolerance and acceptance of cultural pluralism, later, with their exit from school, to expand this complex process of reform of the mentality of the entire society.

### ***Shaping cultural ideal***

The cultural ideal of the individual is, in fact, the values they encompass, how the individual relates to culture. Basically, you are able to know the cultural and linguistic dimensions of your own value system (Dasen, apud Dasen, Perregaux & Rey, 1999).

It is essential that all students develop a multicultural perspective with the intention to provide:

- A better understanding of their own personality;
- Raise awareness in the understanding of others;
- Ability to perceive and understand multiple, diverse conflicts, and interpret them;
- Ability to make decisions and act on it;
- Open mind to possible new claims;
- Understand the process of stereotyping, low maintenance of stereotypical thinking, pride in themselves and respect for others (Gollnik & Chiun, 1991).

For the development of multicultural learning, it is essential the positive environment and classroom confidence, transforming it into a place where all students will feel comfortable, welcome and respected.

Multiculturalism seeks new solutions to problems that appear in modern societies or problems that have not been satisfactorily resolved: the political status of immigrants, minorities, in general, approaching various social disadvantages that come from the differences stated before. Multiculturalism highlights minorities, differences and diversity, but above all, it means a new way of dealing with identity problems, culture and politics.

### ***Developing self-esteem of students in multicultural school space***

Multiculturalism is a philosophy that stresses the importance of legitimacy and vitality of ethnic and cultural diversity in shaping the personality of individuals, groups, nations. In this context, multicultural pedagogy is based on the assumption that the individual belongs to a group with certain ethno-cultural characteristics and, equally, to a national political community.

How they perceive the primary socio-cultural environment, in which they are formed, how they relate to this, determines an evolution of one's training as a sociocultural being. This training is a complex process of formation and reconstruction of personal identity and socio-cultural realities through permanent reporting to varying degrees of concreteness, given in the form of cultural patterns that the child still meets from a young age in the family, in the cultural limited environment, in the educational system.

Self-image develops within primary groups, in close entourage, family, friends, and the entourage of the group "to which the individual is attached by community

sense of belonging". In the family, the child creates their first self-image based on the feedback they receive from family members. The child entering school determines the confrontation with the secondary group, established under the similarity of action: education, employment, etc. Reporting to this group involves more complex variables relevant to the shaping of self-image. There are three factors, relevant characters, if this is put individually, in this context, the child coming from the minority culture, the child coming from the majority culture, and the adult, prepared or not for multicultural educational context. The present complexity of the educational context in which many cultures coexist is given by the fact that, with the entry into the school environment, the number and ways of models to which a child reports is significantly increased, personality development being made in relation to the real models, functional, ideally, which are embodiments of the values.

Self-image is enriched as life experiences that reveal personal characteristics are more varied. School and class can be defined as "contact zones", social spaces where cultures meet and interact through their experiences, personalities whose training is strongly shaped by the concrete experience of contact with others, cultural patterns, values embedded by these people. The way in which this interaction occurs generates decisive impact on the student's self-knowledge and self-assessment of its performance. The school offers the students a variety of behavior configurations and values, which sometimes have a particular impact on children coming from a cultural minority, they are different of the ones perceived before. This search for cultural and social identity becomes, in this context, a particular problem for children in communities experiencing the cultural social values of the majority. This search and otherwise present in children from the majority community as well, has a particular effect on the forming of self-image, especially in the cognitive dimension.

Often, children from a minority culture are evaluated by the teacher or colleagues based only on the norms and values of their own culture without taking into account that it is some individual's own subjectivity. The idea of traditional school failure attributed to this community is also projected on the individual. Self-assessment of the student, labeled so, decreases, and there are negative consequences to be expected in terms of self-presentation.

Children from minority groups are prone to failure to adapt in school, even before they enter the school system. Of course these conditions are often coupled with limited access to economic and educational parents, their ambivalent attitudes regarding cultural transmission to the next generation, the language of communication in the family, different adult - children interaction styles may not prepare the child for the traditional relationship teacher - student.

In a multicultural educational environment variables that can significantly influence the self-image of students from majority and minority communities are:

- Reporting attitude to each other:
  - Teacher's attitudes towards students;

- Student's attitude towards ethnic or cultural minority colleagues.
- Assessment of cultural constructs of others :
  - Stereotypes are sometimes rigid and generalized in student assessment through the terms of their cultural affiliation.
- Reporting to culture :
  - Ambivalence due to biculturalism, manifested by lack of positive cultural identification of minority children to both their culture and to the majority;
  - An alienation from their culture.

Understanding the socio-cultural adapting problems to the school environment must begin with an analysis of the social context in which the educational influence takes place. Factors that influence the nature of social relations are found largely in school with all the positive and negative consequences of their influence. Children enter school showing elements of social networking behaviour and reporting to social acquired in their family. But beyond the cultural manifestation from which most children come from, children belonging to certain minority groups are largely aware even before entering school of images, stereotypes attributed to other groups of the dominant ethnic group of origin. The school can promote the cultural background of minority students and can promote positive evaluations of the group, or may refuse specific minority cultural events by strengthening stereotypes, negative constructs of culture. It is well known in the context of reporting of the student to the teacher, that the children quickly take the attitude of the adult/teacher and manifests that attitude towards the colleagues. The children taking the adults' attitude (parents or teachers), is initially done without a structured system of values or beliefs. It is precisely this apparent opportunity for the school to influence children's social reporting to cultural difference in a positive way. The school has the opportunity to rebut the dominant societal model of relating to each other, to assess cultural or ethnic difference in hierarchical terms.

Students' self- image depends largely in achieving school success, which doesn't only mean the ability to acquire and reproduce some basic cognitive, but also strengthening and enriching cultural identity, valid also when the training is conducted in the language of the minority of which the child belongs to. In school, culture equally means other cultures and their own culture, therefore cultural integration means positively valuing different cultural elements which interact in a multicultural environment. The multicultural perspective is, after all, for the benefit of all students.

Integration of minority cultures means creating a collective cultural space that supports, inserts, reestablishes cultural meanings of members from different communities which are in contact.

Integrating linguistic doesn't mean only the training in the mother tongue, but also to exploit the advantages of the linguistic context by emphasizing multicultural communication in several languages, the impact of multilingualism on cognitive development.

***Minority community involvement in the educational process.***

Negative perceptions of family environment by the teacher can influence and distort the assessment of the child coming from a minority environment. Often teachers, themselves, regard the family as one of the student's disruptive to positive developments. Low status of the family determines often similar positioning of the child in school community.

Intercultural approach in education occurred when it was investigated how minorities fail to integrate into the adopted society. It assumes that the interaction of the individual with adoptive community is, in fact, an interaction between two different cultures, very little consistent. The minority comes from another culture that has formed as an autonomous personality and is forced to assimilate the new culture in order to integrate in the socio-cultural context. This intercultural approach in education is not only a remedy for school failure of minority children registered, but also in strengthening intercultural approach of the teacher.

The question is that of the integration, and not of assimilation. This is a fundamental difference in optics. The new vision is directed towards the integration of those who are coming from the outside in the adopting culture, and not assimilating them.

Assimilation involves the loss of the native cultural identity and gain a false identity, borrowed. Socio-cultural integration involves keeping native cultural identity of the individual, identity which is enriched by accepting and internalizing norms and cultural values of the adoptive society. Integration implies freedom to choose and act and, from another point of view, mutual respect and tolerance.

**Conclusions**

The situation of Roma children is particularly difficult and should be given special attention.

Difficult living conditions, poor health, low access to education and identity crisis, with discrimination by the majority population threaten the very physical existence of ethnicity and its ability to assert themselves.

Local responses to the needs of the Roma school population are mostly nonexistent. In most cases social actors opposing highest resistance in finding local solutions are schools. The motivation is sometimes covered by regulations of the schools or educational policies at the central level. In most schools, it is avoided to recognize that children's school failure is largely due to the school itself. The responsibility for this failure is attributed by most teachers to Roma family or child. They blame the culture and lifestyle of the Roma, considered to be unsuitable for the school situation. The Roma population doesn't pressure their children's school to adapt to the needs of each child, most of the times these pressures are nonexistent, except in communities where there are Roma organizations. The organizations or associations of Roma and non-Roma are virtually the only agents of change, while the strongest resistance to change comes from within the school,



in terms of a small degree of tolerance of the majority population and the lack of involvement of local authorities.

Many children have difficulty in school integration through knowledge of the language in which the educational process takes place. This ends in them being directed to special schools. If there exists a prior preparation, it was observed that they can handle regular school program in schools.

The retention of parents to send their children to school is due to poverty, more than the fact that they belong to the Roma ethnicity. Also, there is a lack of education of Roma parents who do not understand the need to send their children to school.

There are many cases of discriminatory attitudes by teachers who negatively influence children's behavior, who already come to school with a wrong mentality, instilled in the family.

The Roma integration cannot be achieved until there is an improvement in their and their children's education, and until they are offered training opportunities for young people. But the purpose of this integration should not be assimilation or alienation of Roma culture. The major priority should be given to education and training that takes into account the specific way of life of the Roma and Romani language. The language, the culture and social characteristics of the Roma should be an integrant part of the efforts of national governments and European institutions to promote cultural diversity at all levels. An important step in this direction could be to find suitable means the promotion of Roma people in secondary and high schools.

To solve the educational problems of the Roma community there needs to venture into actions so that the Roma families understand the value of education, and support school integration in the national network of education for their children and the abolition of routing Roma children to special schools.

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