



## Aspects of Intercultural Education in Schools Border. Case Study

### KEYWORDS

multiethnic schools, intercultural education, linguistic identity

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### ABSTRACT

Today, it is impossible to speak of pure and closed cultural spaces. From the pedagogical perspective, it involves learning plans, projects and specific intercultural education school programs, with emphasis on diversity, but also on the knowledge of their own culture. This study aims to tap some of the results of activities and research done in the project Collaboration for Equality of Chances in Multi-ethnic Cross-border Education, in ten localities in the Romanian-Hungarian border area, where the multiethnic communities live. We combined in our study quantitative and qualitative research methods: setting educational policy documents, curriculum documents, statistics and population demographics of the regions surveyed, interviews. This approach demonstrates that the problem in multiethnic communities in Romania and Hungary are the same: in all multiethnic schools is applied a national curriculum, with very few options for implementing the values of intercultural education.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of cultural, social and demographic diversity is a constant in the world today. It is impossible to speak of a world of uniformity, of a pure closed cultural spaces. All the more so as our attention turns to multiethnic communities on both sides of the Romanian-Hungarian border. The diversity of cultures of these two countries was creatively enriched by the historical context, rich in contacts, interactions, and cultural borrowing. In these cases, multiculturalism has developed in various moments of the history of each country, most often in the context of migration (determined by historical or social context). The multitude of ethnic groups in a village / a community, exists for hundreds and thousands of years.

This study aims to tap some of the results of the activities and researches during the project HURO / 0801/124, *Collaboration for Equality of Chances in Multi-ethnic Cross-border Education*, project funded under the Cooperation Program Hungary-Romania, in ten localities in the Romanian-Hungarian border area (5 in each country), where multiethnic communities live.

We know that in any human society, linguistic, cultural, ethnic or religious, there are both advantages and drawbacks. These are both a source of enrichment and of tension. A wise attitude is to recognize the complexity of the phenomenon, trying to maximize positive effects and minimize negative ones (Busse & Krause, 2015). The differences should not be a challenge, but a gain. Cultural diversity, whether it's ethnical, racial or religious, represents a spiritual gain, with the condition to be discovered and put into practice under the idea of reciprocal valuing, into universality, under this axiomatic plurality.

A major role in this multi-ethnic communities is this linguistic identity. At the individual level linguistic socialization is crucial in a complex social process, because language is a key factor in the development of the personality, in general and of the attitudes and beliefs, in particular. At community level, the linguistic socialization is a central factor for keeping the community's language (assimilation of a community can be documented through processes of language loss, which reflects shortcomings in the language socializa-

tion mechanisms).

Learning/assimilation of a language depends on individual variables (motivation, language skills etc.) as well as on the contexts in which it occurs. We are talking thus, about the formal (school), non-formal (school activities, holidays, festivals etc.) and informal contexts (family, group of friends, media outlets etc.). Language is not just a vehicle for communication, it is also a dimension of culture invested with deep symbolic meanings. It is a symbol of individual and national identity, a symbol of historical continuity, therefore, the language is the carrier and keeper of the cultural values. (Bradea, 2010). Thus, children's education, regardless of their ethnical origins, should consider this aspect. Only knowing your own identity, valuing it to your own benefit, your community's and the benefit of others, only then we can truly talk about intercultural relations (Blândul 2010). The linguistic field of socialization in these ten cities surveyed in our study, vary from homogeneity to heterogeneity, also depending on the ethno-demographic context. The institutions that take responsibility or just play a role in the transmission of the ethno-nationalistic culture vary as well, from one locality to another and depending on the minorities concerned. The school, however, in each of these cases, plays a central role.

### II. METHODS AND RESULTS

Based on these theoretical considerations, the research objectives were: (1) investigate attitudes towards minority groups or taught languages; (2) identify how formal education favors the acquisition of mother tongue and their own culture; (3) identify how to value cultural education in schools.

The study strategy used for the exploration was complex, The phrase "The study strategy used for the exploration was complex, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods" will replace „The study strategy combined quantitative and qualitative research methods" combining quantitative and qualitative research methods: setting educational policy documents, curriculum documents, statistics and population demographics of the regions surveyed, interviews (in the form of narrative research).

This empirical research has helped us to have a realistic picture of the issues investigated: Who are the students, where/what environment they live in what schools they learn, which is the linguistic area where they usually interact, what language needs they have, which is the school's role in the process of transmission of cultural heritage.

The research took into account 10 villages with multiethnic population in Romania and Hungary, in the border region. These places are characterized by common elements (in each of them living at least three ethnic groups), and the elements that differentiate them (economic, social, heterogeneous or homogeneous linguistic environment, different types of relations between ethnic groups etc.).

All the data from this study leverages the existing official statistics in the municipalities and in schools, according to the last census. There are situations in almost every village, where ethnicity does not match with the language. Or where individuals belonging to an ethnical group, declare themselves belonging to the majority population of the locality.

**Table 1: Percentage of ethnic groups in multiethnic schools in Romania:**

Localities	Romanians %	Hungarians %	Germans %	Rroma %
Palota	22,96	25,44	51,13	0
Bervenii	10,2	87,5	0	2,3
Foieni	3,81	68,97	21,17	5,66
Urziceni	1,84	72,04	26,11	0
Hirip	25	37	0	38

**Table 2: Percentage of ethnic groups in multiethnic schools in Hungary:**

Localities	Romanians %	Hungarians %	Rroma %
Apateu	30	65,5	5
Bojt	0	85	15
Nagykeréki	10	87	3
Körösszakál	34	34	32
Körösnagyhar- sany	4,3	82,9	12,8

The Hungarian villages during the communist period, but also before, supported an assimilation policy of minorities. Thus today, all the members of multiethnic communities primarily speak Hungarian, accepting the official language as a necessity in communication.

In Romania, for the Hungarian and German minorities, consistent in many areas of the country, there are programs developed, there are manuals and a specific minority education. However, research results have shown that cross-border problems in multiethnic schools, in both Romania and Hungary, are mostly the same: mutual ignorance and lack of implementation of their values in school education. Every school applies a national curriculum with very few options for implementing the values of each ethnic group in the school / community. Although in both countries a legal framework for the functioning of schools for minorities exist, although there is a curricula for native language and literature implemented, as well as culture and civilization of its own ethnic minority, language and intercultural education is still hard to achieve. The reasons are different from case to case: lack of qualified teachers in

deprived areas with low school population, lack of teachers who can practice intercultural education and become true agents of change, limited financial and material resources for infrastructure rehabilitation for an educational and material basis; even truancy and school dropout, especially the Roma population, both in Hungary and in Romania; lack of teachers who know the Romani language to cope with the „imposed“ Romani language textbooks. This is a special case in both countries: neither Hungary nor Romania have teachers who are specialized or have specific skills for teaching Romany. Therefore, in most cases, they are assimilated by the majority. Equally true is that, whether or not assimilated linguistically, poor living conditions, unstable financial statements, lack of permanent jobs, accompanied by countless prejudices, negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes from others favored among Roma people poor school attendance and a massive increase in the number of illiterate people. They become more concerned about the tomorrow's fate, than the educational path of their children. In Romania, not even the few restructurings that occurred, educational programs to preserve ethnic identity and language (introducing study subjects as Roma language, history and traditions of the Roma minority, or the development of textbooks in Romany dictionary Romanian-Romany, preparing teachers to teach Roma classes Roma minority etc.) have failed to persuade Roma parents to educate their children.

The significant role of the families in promoting their own culture is proving to be more and more an exception in the villages that were subject to our research. Unfortunately, the family, regardless of its' ethnical origin, is not valuing enough the specific values and their culture.

But there are in every village dedicated people, willing to devote their energy, time, concern for the preservation and support of this culture, to strengthen and promote these communities in non-formal context: folk festivals, school competitions, religious holidays of minority, joint activities for all common minorities etc.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Education in multiethnic communities should facilitate both assimilation and cultivate their own culture, pride formation on this culture and attitudes of respect and appreciation for the culture of others. Based on the assimilation of the native language (Tulasiewicz, 2015) and the national culture, as well as through the development of identity and sense of belonging to a cultural group, the education in multiethnic communities must implement the idea of diversity and cultural models, but also emphasize the universal element of culture. But, above all, should determine a sense of belonging and appreciation of their own culture. Only knowing your own culture and being proud of belonging to an ethnic group, you can understand the one living near you. Students need to understand that regardless of ethnicity, religion, language etc. all people are the same, have equal rights, and thus, everyone's culture must be valued and respected.

From the pedagogical perspective, it involves learning plans, projects and specific intercultural education school programs, with emphasis on diversity, but also on the knowledge of their own culture (Capone & Mey, 2015).

Based on the above arguments, we consider essential the curricular development in initial and continuing training of teaching staff, preparing them to become real intercultural trainers (Nedelcu, 2008). This requires knowledge, skills,

competencies to express the cultural values, the need to live in tolerance, to support children's participation in compulsory education, to facilitate the good understanding between families, the local community and the school. On the other hand it is necessary to extend the formal education in a non-formal context. Because, as I mentioned, language is not just the acquisition of language, but also the development of attitudes, self-confidence, develop a positive self-image, developing a sense of belonging to a group, knowing the other and especially knowing each other. It is essential to teach children of different ethnicities to live *together*, not only *with* the other. In this respect, the role of extracurricular activities is undeniable. In such non-formal context, participating at common activities children can interact, can mobilize to achieve common goals for the success of their own ethnic group, but for the whole community to which they belong.

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