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Social Equality Through Multicultural Education – a Means for Reducing Prejudices and Stereotypes in the Educational Process

Introduction

The text presents the partial results of qualitative research that focused on analysis of multicultural education within the framework of education programmes in terms of the educational system in the Czech Republic. The monographic procedure was applied using an analytic-synthetic approach based on content analysis of relevant documents. The text is a theoretical platform and it presents a fundamental theoretical definition towards the solved topic. The aim of this paper is to point to the selection of available bases of multicultural education in the curriculum of pre-school, basic school, secondary school and tertiary education.

Definition of social equality

The phenomenon of social equality is referred to differently in the context of various social sciences. We can find references such as social justice, equal access, the same obligations and the same rights etc. It is not about the term as such. It is about the nature of the problem in its broader sense. The term has historical, scientific, psychological or legislative connotations. Society has always been dealing with this phenomenon. The term social justice tends to be conceptualized in legislative terms; we rely on equal rights and equal obligations in terms of the standards

adopted by society. Equal access symbolizes global behaviour, including attitudes and opinions. Social equality is placed into a socio-cultural dimension, based on morality, ethics and the philosophy of human actions. Katarína Vanková (2012) writes that in the context of social justice, it is about the relevance to one's own life, to the environment, to home, to society in general. Social equality is relevant to the culture of society; however, it does not ignore valid and recognized legal standards. It is based on the assumption that there is only one culture in the whole world, but that it has various forms. The specific form depends on the place, nation, its language, religion, etc. People should be socially equal. They should not create artificial mechanisms supporting differentiation of human groups. It only militates against social equality (for more see Rowls 1995).

Human society has still not reached the stage of social equality. It is a major problem, changing with the development of society. From the very beginning of the existence of humankind, various opinions were presented on the question of social equality. Perspectives are highly variable, e.g. religious, historical, philosophical, anthropological, etc. The religious context of social equality has its own specifications; it reflects belief or general religious attributes. The same can be said of historical and philosophical contexts. Complete social equality has never been reached by society. It is some kind of "an idea of good", "the highest idea". Processes and mechanisms for the development of social equality are desirable and necessary for society. They are related to the existence of human good, to the existence of man on earth. The emerging processes and mechanisms keep humanism in our being and support for humanity (for more see e.g. Xenofon 2006, Aristoteles 2009, Rawls 2007).

Definition of multicultural education

Multicultural education (ME) consists of several concepts. It is approached as a newly formed discipline, as a science dealing with the question of social equality in all social contexts (historical, sociological, anthropological, psychological, etc.). It is also approached as a discipline

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that has become part of curriculum documents of preschool, primary and higher secondary education. It appears in the curricula of accredited university subjects of humanities (especially at socially oriented faculties, faculties of education, faculties of arts, etc.). Jan Průcha (2006, p. 15) generally defines multicultural education as "…*an educational activity focused on teaching people of various ethnic groups, nations, racial and religious groups to live together, respect each other and cooperate. It is implemented on the basis of various programmes in schools and in out-of-school facilities, in courses for adults, in advertising campaigns, in political issues.*" Multicultural education is thus an activity built on the philosophy of eliminating prejudices, stereotypes, historical and personal animosities. Its central topic is social equality; its relative concept, a contribution to harmony in human society. Educational activity in practice (*in education*) influences cognitive processes, particularly awareness, assessment and evaluation. This builds and supports tolerance, respect, reverence, the ability to accept difference.

In multicultural education we define dominant groups and target groups. They are formed spontaneously, usually on the principle of majority and minority. The target group becomes the group against which constant oppression is created; it is very often discriminated against, segregated, socially excluded, marginalized and is the victim of other negative behaviour. The dominant group is the group that creates such oppression for no real objective reasons. The dominant group behaves in this way on the basis of entirely subjective generalized judgements and believes that it is entitled to do so. In this sense we speak about oppressism (*oppression*) (ISbSA 2005). For definition of dominant and target groups we take into consideration two basic criteria:

- the criterion of majority and minority,
- the criterion of possible change from majority to minority and vice versa.

If a person with a given characteristic generally always belongs to the majority and at some point, in a certain situation, where the "majority-conceived characteristic" seems to be a minority, he/she does not become

part of a target group. The existence of this condition can be changed. He/she can leave the group and change one's minority placement to majority one. (Kaleja 2011)

An exemplary situation: *The teacher who belongs to majority society is in the classroom with pupils who belong solely to the Romani ethnic group. The minority is thus the teacher; the pupils belong to the majority. However, the teacher belongs to the dominant group. He/she has the option to leave the classroom. If he she does so, in the terms of ethnicity he/she becomes the majority, of which he/she is actually a member. The pupils cannot change their position. Therefore they are the target group.*

Oppressism manifests itself explicitly and implicitly. It is always created by dominant groups. Its forms are various and they also reach different dimensions or intensity. We are not always able to notice these manifestations of oppression early enough and adequately fight against them. The forms of oppressism are as follows:

- Ageism. This is oppression on the basis of age difference. When an older person oppresses somebody who is younger or vice versa. The reasons and manifestations may vary. In this case the target group as a consequence of life experience may have capacity in the course of life to be transformed into the dominant group. This is a matter of time.
- Able-bodism. This is oppression on the basis of bodily dispositions and disproportions. The reasons and manifestations are various. In this case it is necessary to take into account their character. With regard to the body build, the influence of various factors can make a difference. If we have in mind the physical dispositions related to the disability of a person, this cannot be changed. This condition is permanent. Thus individuals with disabilities are always the target group.
- Elitism/Classism. This is oppression based on social classes. In this case, status of one or the other group can change depending on various general and individual factors.

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- Sexism. This is oppression based on the sex, where one group oppresses the other (men vs. women, women vs. men), depending on the conditions in which those concerned are situated.

- Heterosexism. This is characterised by oppression based on sexual orientation. It is an unchangeable condition, very often interpreted by the public as a sexual disorder of deviance. However, the notion that different sexual orientation can be diagnosed has been rejected. (It was removed from the list of diseases in the International Classification of Diseases drawn up by WHO in 1990.)

- Racism. This is oppression based on race. In this case, making the change from majority to minority is not possible. With regard to ethnic pluralism, racism is a relic that should have been banished from our society long ago. Racism is, however, present and is often quite widespread.

- Nationalism. This is oppression based on the citizenship in a nation, where the nation of the majority of society subjectively believes that all the rights and obligations of the state belong exclusively to them. They believe that all general privileges of the country belong exclusively to them, and that others have a subordinate status. Nationalism as a form of an oppression is also specific in that it can occur within the target group. Such inverted nationalism arises as a result of various psychological tendencies, when the target group endogenously closes and perceives the dominant group in the same way the dominant group perceives the target one.

- Atheism. This is oppression based on religion, which is based on faith. Here the target and the dominant groups can be formed variously, depending on the location, internal and external conditions of the state (society).

These forms of oppression are fundamental problems that we encounter from the perspective of social equality. However, these problems can have different widths and heights (*horizontal and vertical dimensions*). The creation of social equality and the forming of multiculturalism in each

person is necessary. The seriousness of the situation is demonstrated by the issue of globalisation, globalisation trends, extensive Europeanism, the linking of the humanity on Earth (Horká 2000). Today we speak about human society in terms of a secular society that is losing its "spirit"; about a society whose spiritual dimension gradually emerges from mankind, and mankind thus gains new characteristics (for more see Mühlpachr-Bargel (eds.) 2010). In this way, the scope of the concept of multicultural education in our conditions can be fundamentally outlined.

Social equality in legislation

The Czech Republic is a legal democratic state established on a so-called civic principle. In the Constitution of the Czech Republic (Act No. 1/1993 Coll.), in the law of the highest legal power, it is defined that the bearer of statehood is not a nation but the people. This ensures the acceptance of the national heterogeneity of the citizens of the Czech Republic. Citizens of the Czech state may have a different nationality or even a declaration that their affiliation to a certain national group is based on a free decision and will. Nobody can be denied their rights and obligations based on the criterion of nationality. In connection with the Constitution of the Czech Republic, the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms is defined (Act No. 2/1993 Coll.). Article 24 explicitly states that: "*Belonging to a national or ethnic minority must not be to anyone's detriment.*" Moreover, the Article 25, states: "*Citizens who constitute national or ethnic minorities are guaranteed versatile development, in particular the right to develop their own culture with other members of minorities, the right to disseminate and receive information in their native language and to unite in national associations.*

The legislative framework of a social equality in the society is set up both on the national and international levels. However, it seems that in many cases there are frequent violations of these rules, or these are not clearly defined. On the other hand, the rules are often violated and in general practice we can quite often see unbalanced interpretations of social equality.

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From the perspective of an international legislative context in particular we can generally rely on following documents:

- Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UN, 1992),
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN, 1966),
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UN, 1965),
- European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Act No. 209/1992 Coll.),
- Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2009),
- Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe, 1995),
- The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Council of Europe, 1992),
- and others.

The Czech key legislative documents can be classified mainly as follows:
- *Constitutional Act No. 1/1993 Coll., as amended (the Constitution),*
- Constitutional Act No. 2/1993 Coll. (Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms),
- Act No. 40/2009 Coll., The Criminal Code,
- 273/2001 Coll., On the rights of persons belonging to national minorities,
- Act No. 198/2009 Coll., On the equal treatment and legal protection against discrimination and amending certain laws (Antidiscrimination Act),
- and others.

Multicultural education in curriculum

The implementation of multicultural education is highly dependent on the actual teacher, on his/her personality, knowledge (not only

educational), experience, abilities, skills, motivation, opinions and attitudes. All of the above mentioned pedagogic-psychological categories influence a teacher's educational activities style, his / her professional approach to the question of equal opportunities and social equality. If the focus on multicultural education is only formal, out of necessity, which is determined by curricula documents, intentional influence on the positive development of pupils' personality is not ensured. Dana Švingalová (2007, p. 101) states that the level of multicultural education depends on "…*the level of teacher's preparedness in the sphere of multicultural education, both of the contemporary teacher as well as students preparing for this profession.*"

The concept of multicultural education in existing curricula documentation from preschool education to the view of the university curricula of humanities oriented disciplines or the disciplines of related professions is discussed below.

Preschool education

The Frame Educational Programme for Preschool Education (FEP PE) is a document containing a definition of this level of education. It defines the concept and aims of learning, the key competences, learning areas, conditions and self-evaluation, etc. The curricular system of preschool education is different from that of primary school education. The Frame Educational Programme for Preschool Education does not explicitly define the sphere of multicultural education as a cross-section theme. It is represented in a different way. The topics mingle through all five educational spheres. In more details e.g. in the educational sphere Child and the world, one of the partial educational aims is:"…*learning about other cultures...*" (FEP PE 2004, p. 26). In the expected outcomes, i.e. what should the child manage at the end of preschool education, it is stated: "…*perceive that the world has an order, that is it diverse and remarkable, infinitely colourful and diverse – both the world of nature as well as the world of people (to be fundamentally aware of the existence of other*

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nations and cultures, different countries, planet Earth, space, etc.)" (FEP PE 2004, p. 27).

According to Marxtová (2005) multicultural education in preschool (also in the preparatory class of the primary school) is a "multicultural" education that accepts cultures of all nationalities of children in the classroom. It emphasizes the importance of multicultural education for children at preschool age. Children aged 4–7 do not have prejudices; they are not aware of other nations or ethnic groups. They are characterized by a strong egocentrism and they believe that other people see the world through their eyes. If there are any opinions, e.g. about the colour of another child's skin, these opinions are taken from adults, and from their surroundings. Dvořáková (in Mertin, Gillernová 2003) argues that all children at this age have equal status. This is how they perceive it. The teacher should pay attention to all children and reflect their individual needs. Multicultural education, the possible integration of foreigners does not mean assimilation, nor their segregation, but rather full respect for the child's personality and the cultural and linguistic environment from which the child comes.

Primary education

The Frame Educational Programme for Primary Education (FEP PrE) is a document containing 4 parts (A, B, C, D). Part A defines the document with respect to curricular policy in the Czech Republic. Part B provides the characteristics of this level of education. Part C defines the concept and aims of learning, key competences, learning areas, cross-section themes and frame educational plan. Part D deals with the issue of education of pupils with special educational needs and also with material, hygienic and safety principles.

The aims of primary education are to help pupils create and gradually develop key competences and provide a reliable foundation of general education orientated mainly towards life situations and practical behaviour. Key competences *"represent a set of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and values important for personal development and success in the life*

of each member of the society. Their choice and conception come out of the values generally accepted by the society and from generally shared images about which competences of an individual contribute to his/her education, happy and successful life and to strengthen functions of human society" (FEP PrE, 2007, p. 14). The key competences include: competence to learn, competence to solve problems, communicative competence, social and personal competence, civil competence and working competence. The Frame Educational Programme for Primary Education has 9 educational spheres. They relate to particular subjects (e.g. language and language communication, mathematics and its applications, etc.). We also include cross-section themes in the educational spheres. They represent current issues of the contemporary world and they become an integral and important part of primary education. They have a formative character; they create opportunities for the success of pupils and also for their mutual cooperation. They help to develop the pupil's personality (Šimoník, 2005). Belonging to the cross-section themes are: personality and social education, education of democratic citizen, education towards thinking in a European and global context, multicultural education**,** environmental education and media education. "*The thematic area of cross-section themes goes across the educational spheres and enables the linking of educational contents and subjects. This contributes to the comprehensive education of pupils and positively influences the process of formation and development of key competences"* (Šimoník, 2005, p. 28). Not all the cross-section themes may be included at all grades. During primary education, the school is obliged to offer pupils all the topics of particular cross-section themes. Their scope and the way they are to be implemented is determined by the school educational programme. The cross-section theme of multicultural education can be integrated into the content of education as an integrated part of some subject, separate subject or also as projects, seminars, courses, etc. The topics of the cross-section themes of multicultural education are:

- cultural difference (uniqueness, idiosyncrasies),
- human relations (coexistence, cooperation, integration, human solidarity),

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- ethnic origin (equality – thinking, perception, manifestation),
- multiculturalism (mutual enrichment),
- principle of social reconciliation and solidarity (responsibility, involvement, human rights).

Implementation of multicultural education in the conditions of the school educational programme is realized in 4 possible ways:

- by integration of topics of cross-section themes of multicultural education into other subjects,
- by teaching multicultural education as a separate subject of the school education programme,
- through project education,
- by combination of all three of the above mentioned methods.

Secondary education

The Frame Educational Programmes for Secondary Technical and Vocational Schools were prepared in several phases in the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education; they were then approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. A separate frame educational programme was developed for each field of study, and at the same time the number of fields was reduced to approximately 275, and these were approached widely. In our paper, therefore, we focus only on grammar school education.

The Frame Educational Programme for Grammar Schools (FEP GS) from 2007 contains 4 parts (A, B, C, D). Part A defines the document with respect to curricular policy in the Czech Republic. Part B provides the characteristics of this type of higher secondary education. Part C defines the concept and aims of learning, the key competences, learning areas, cross-section themes, frame educational plan and principles of education. Part D deals with the issue of education of pupils with special educational needs, including exceptionally talented pupils. Belonging to 5 cross-section theme

of Frame Educational Programme for Grammar School is: personality and social education, education towards thinking in a European and global context, multicultural education, environmental education and media education. All the themes have a direct relationship to the educational spheres and their benefit is in the development of pupil's personality both in the area of attitudes and values, as well as in the sphere of knowledge, skills and abilities. Cross-section themes can be realized in a very similar way as in primary education.

A pupil in secondary education is in the period of adolescence. Adolescence is a sensitive period for determination one's personal identity, for its development, for conflict with one's surroundings and himself / herself. For those who failed to properly "fulfil" the previous developmental obligations in pubescence, or even in earlier periods, the fight is particularly difficult. This is the period of searching for oneself. An adolescent's identity is based on accepted moral principles and experience with their preservation. The content of the cross-section theme of multicultural education is for this ontogenetic phase of human life quite important – indeed, possibly crucial.

Undergraduate education

The undergraduate preparation of students at universities is based on the documents of accreditation of the disciplines they study. Purposefully, we focus on fields of studies oriented in the humanities, but especially on undergraduate preparation of teachers. The scope of multicultural topics or subject (*in the university environment variously defined)* is directly dependent on the studied discipline. The scope or content of this issue is not explicitly defined anywhere. The difference is possible with the same disciplines studied at different universities. The names of the subjects vary, their conception is variable. They are characterized by considerable heterogeneity (*e.g. multicultural education, multicultural upbringing, intercultural education, social and multicultural aspects of education, intercultural psychology, minorities' cultures, etc.*). Multicultural

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education in the undergraduate education of future teachers is assured. The assessment of its quality (the quality of the preparation) would certainly be worthy of national or international comparative research. The basic problem is the insufficient preparation of teachers for the realization of cross-section themes. The teachers can be introduced to the cross-section themes via further education of pedagogic staff or similarly oriented courses. They are in some cases formal, and the requested time (demand) is variable and insufficient. As a result of these characteristics, from the methodologically-didactic perspective it cannot fully satisfy the needs of teachers.

An example: An empirical investigation was undertaken (winter semester 2009, winter semester 2010) with 4 large groups of students (approx. 40–70, the total number of students was 230) of combined forms of education for the teaching profession. Those students are in most cases already working at schools and they implement multicultural education as a cross-section theme of school educational programmes at a particular school. The results show that their knowledge of the terminology of multicultural education is quite low. Very often they only guess the meaning of the term; sometimes they use these instead of different terms. It can be surmised what the effects of this education has on pupils. Some of them do not place the education of multicultural education into the context of social equality; they are not able to apply the defined topics of the curriculum in practice (school or life).

Conclusion

Multicultural education thus represents a tool to support the psycho-social development of children and pupils in the educational process. In the curricular documents we find thematic units dealing with multicultural aspects. However, it depends on the teachers' personality and approach, what way they use to implement the dispositions into the process of education in order to maximise the possible development of individuals within the target group.

Social equality is a phenomenon related to the existence of the human good and to the existence of man on earth. People have always been dealing with social equality ever since, but they have not reached it so far. It is "an idea of good" and the "highest idea". It has its own historical, religious, philosophical, anthropological and other contexts. Continually emerging new processes and mechanisms of social equality keep humanity in our being and support humanity. Multicultural education is one of the means of supporting this thought. We meet the conception of multicultural education in the conditions of education. It plays an important role in shaping the functions of human life.

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Abstract:

The paper deals with the topic of social equality. It defines the basic terminology, clarifies the issue in the context of reducing prejudices and stereotypes. It emphasizes the importance of developing the processes and mechanisms for social equality, for fostering humanity in human beings. One of the key mechanisms is multicultural education. The author of the paper interprets it in the educational process, beginning with preschool education and ending with tertiary education.

Keywords: multicultural education, prejudice, social equality, stereotype, oppression, education.

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