Imre Lipcsei

Szent István University, Hungary

A New Challenge in Institutional Education – Multiculturalism in Preschools and Elementary Schools

Introduction

The social and cultural environment of the school and the kindergarten has experienced significant changes over the last few decades. Aside from the institutions, all this has strongly affected teachers since children who come from different economic, cultural and family backgrounds arrive at kindergarten and school with different levels of education and other moral values. The children of immigrant workers, refugees and other immigrants keep on increasing this diversity, which requires teachers to have new competences. It is beyond doubt that multiculturalism has moved into education as well. But when did multiculturalism appear?

Multiculturalism has been in the limelight again since the second half of the 20th century, and this is largely due to the fact that new cultures, religions and conventions have emerged in increasingly heterogeneous societies, and as a result contradictions have occurred more and more strongly. The endeavour to become acquainted with other people has become a pre-requisite of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, since by reappraising "otherness" has come into focus.

When browsing the specialized literature, it is impossible to find a uniform view in relation to multiculturalism. Some people think it can be traced back to the past decades, but those grounded in reality admit that this is not a new, but rather a rediscovered and reinterpreted term, since the coexistence of peoples, and thus the coexistence of cultures and religions have occurred long before the spread of the concept.

Acceptance and inclusion in the service of multicultural education

During multicultural education, the different needs and requirements of a society with a variety of cultural backgrounds are emphasized. Due to a broadening of migration such an educational policy is required which allows the cultural particularities of minorities to be maintained during the educational process. It is important to take into account the fact that children from different social classes go to kindergarten and school. In pedagogy, we have taught for a very long time that the first place of socialization is the family. This thesis, believed to be eternal, is, however, becoming less and less true. Why do I claim this so firmly? Because parents do not always provide the basis for socialization. They lack the basic principles of etiquette, the knowledge of the rules of coexistence, tolerance and the need to get to know others. If a child does not feel that the adults around him or her observe the expected minimum standards of human contact, then it is difficult to educate him or her about this. If a parent does not greet others, the germs of etiquette might not be discovered in his or her child's behaviour either. If the child resolves conflicts by using force, or attempts to validate his or her arguments not reasonably, but in a loud manner, then the kindergarten and the school must play an ever greater role. It is in this context that children must be acclimatized to accept the fact that it is possible to live differently: there are rules and obligations. Teachers have unanimously formulated the principle that everything must be done in order to help children integrate into society later on.

For all this to be successful, inclusion and receptivity must appear in pedagogical methods. One must accept every kind of group which has useful values, even for the majority middle class children.

In education, the acceptance of diversity, different religions and traditions must increasingly be prioritized. Furthermore, we must also ensure that students understand the fact that not everybody thinks and behaves in the way to which they have become accustomed. We must make them more familiar with otherness, and we must also make them feel the claim to know other people. In order to become acquainted with other people and nations, we have to know their history, culture, religion

and the moral values associated with them. Only by doing this will we understand why and what they are doing; and even if they show their emotions and wishes differently, they do not have bad intentions, they only express themselves differently. It is important that they should accept and consider values that are different from their own to be natural.

The basic guideline of multicultural education lies in the fact that equal opportunity, equal rights to education and a ban on discrimination must also be available to every citizen, including immigrants and to children belonging to minorities as well. People belonging to ethnic minorities have the same rights as the members of the mainstream society, namely the preservation and transmission of their culture is a universal human right. In developed countries, experts have realized that conflicts must be avoided, and people must strive for peaceful coexistence instead. Therefore, they try to improve the minorities' plight in various ways; thus, for example, they make it possible for the immigrants' children to have access to education in their mother tongue, separate programmes are organized for the minorities, scholarships are established, their further education is promoted, higher education quotas are provided for them, and equal opportunity is supported even by positive discrimination as well. All this is often carried out with the help of the slogan of democracy, cultural pluralism and equality (Forray, Hegedűs, 1998).

Banks (2001) thinks it is important to decrease prejudices in multicultural education. In this respect, he describes his strategies and approaches to children's races, different ethnic groups, sexes, religions, the poor and the rich, old and young people, as well as to individuals of different abilities. A reduction in prejudices can largely be facilitated by the introduction of new pedagogic methods and a rethinking of those techniques that are already available. During the development of cooperative techniques, teachers have clearly adopted the view that the success of children in school who belong to disadvantaged minority or ethnic groups can be significantly improved through cooperative learning situations. All this improves not only the self-esteem of children who, until then, are pushed into the background, but they can also win their classmates' acknowledgement and receptivity. If children who are in the background

feel that they are necessary in the community, that their work is also useful for the group, and that the other children rely on what they are doing, then their attitude will change, too. They accept themselves for who they are. In the kindergarten, children are already aware of whose parents are richer, since they can see where their friends live, in what car they are given a lift to the nursery school, and where their friends go on holiday. But they also know who are cleverer, who can draw more nicely, and who can recite poems by themselves at the nursery school festivity. A hierarchy is soon formed among children which they take into school. That is why a receptive milieu is needed in order to ensure that everybody can be aware of their importance in the group.

Interaction of the individual, the community and the society

Multicultural education cannot be treated as an insulated phenomenon, since the values that keep alive in children the elemental standards of social coexistence are present in all fields of life. The idea that acceptance, tolerance and suppression of prejudice can be developed in children by certain momentary events is not sustainable.

After Gorski, Torgyik (2004) defined multicultural education at three levels. According to them, multiculturalism also appears at the level of the individual, the school community and the society which can exist independently from one another, and can be interrelated as well.

At **the individual level** of education, teachers play, naturally, the most decisive role because they have the closest contact with the children. Their personal exemplification is a pattern for their students; therefore, what they say and how they behave are important. Of course, it is difficult to meet all the expectations, since teachers are models not only in kindergartens and schools, but they also have to behave in the other fields of life in such a way as to suggest positive moral values. The question may arise as to where a teacher's private life begins. Do they have it at all? Since in shops, in the street, on the sports ground, on the beach and in the department store, their every manifestation – including their

clothing and reactions – can be regarded as being part of a certain mosaic of the image that is formed of them.

During education, one must pay attention to both direct and indirect influences. In many cases, when children are being disciplined or praised, the other children also get something from the teacher's "*message*". What teachers allow while children are playing and expressing their opinions, or during participation in competitions, is a signal concerning their attitude to children belonging to different social groups. Similarly, it is important to know how teachers will be able to stay grounded in reality while making their decision, and to what extent they give freedom to their students. How their teachers can handle conflicts is a matter that is also crucial for children. Do they take on key issues from a social point of view, too? How do they handle the problems in connection with Gypsy children? Many teachers do not know what to do if Gypsy children do not go to school, or if they do not behave with their friends or teachers in a suitable way. I think no special treatment is needed, since it is not good for anybody if teachers apply a different standard. This is exactly a form of discrimination that has negative consequences for everybody. Of course, teachers must become familiar with the habits and traditions of Gypsies, and these must be respected, but they have to formulate the same ethical requirements for everybody in the group. When we talk about **the community**, we think of all the persons that can be found in kindergartens and schools: like children, the kindergarten teacher, the teacher and people helping the educators with their work, the other people working in the institution who are in touch with one another as well. It is not irrelevant how participants in education or other individuals who are indirectly in contact with children can handle their prejudices with regard to people, and children who belong to different social, ethnic, minority, cultural, religious and age groups. Children react sensitively to all kinds of manifestations targeted at them; moreover, they can even decode nonverbal communication quite well, too**.** For this reason, it is important that in the institution, everybody must be receptive, tolerant and understanding. **The social level** of multicultural education determines the two previous levels, too. When handling social problems, it may be

a step forward if the kindergarten and the school do not point out a certain ethnicity from the possible identities of the individual or the group, and with this, they should not give absolute priority to it, either. The formation of a more complex identity must be enhanced, so multiculturalism highlights that approach according to which diversity is a normal thing. Of course, it does not mean that we consider cultural difference to be non-existent, but it is just one variant from several possible identities. We must ensure that people realize that it is natural that every society is fairly complex, and can be divided in many ways. Consequently, people can simultaneously be attached to several kinds of social dimensions by their sense of identity as well.

When a certain ethnic minority presents itself to the others, it reflects the naturalness and beauty of cultural diversity. In this respect, it makes no sense to talk about minority and mainstream society, but instead we should acknowledge the complexity of our society and culture (Forray 2003).

Multicultural Education Against Prejudice and Rejection

In a multicultural society, people belonging to different minorities, ethnic groups and races rub up against one another in several fields. In public places, they cannot avoid one another. It is true that sometimes people belonging to the majority endeavour to isolate themselves. Because of their prejudices, they reject common programmes with "*other people*", and if possible, they visit such places where they can be together with people of similar social status. According to Aronson (1978), children with different family backgrounds must very early on in their education be accustomed to cooperation in school. Cooperation can reduce rejection and aggression not only in schools, but also in society. For this purpose, he elaborated the mosaic method which he began to employ more than thirty years ago. In a town in Texas, it was thought that it was enough to reduce and later on cease prejudice and rejection if mixed classes were set up at a school where Afro-American, white and Spanish children were

together. However, instead of the expected positive result, exactly the opposite happened. According to Aronson, the continuous competition only increased prejudices and aggression among children; therefore, he formed such groups within a class in which every child had their own task and role, and they could be successful only if they worked together. They listened to, helped and assessed one another; moreover, the other children's performance was important for themselves. Rejection and aggression can be pushed into the background if young people of different abilities, family backgrounds and origins are obliged to cooperate with one another within the classrooms if they acquire syllabus material in small groups. The method has produced positive results: aggression has significantly decreased in those classes in which the teachers are educating children using this technique. Aronson believes the mosaic method is not a 'magic bullet', but it is just one of the elements of the fight against rejection. Besides all this, the family background, the milieu and what the media is transmitting are very important. He reassures those teachers who want to test this method that it is very simple: they only have to follow ten steps.

1) Divide students into 5- or 6-person jigsaw groups. The groups should be diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, and ability.
2) Appoint one student from each group as the leader. Initially, this person should be the most mature student in the group.
3) Divide the day's lesson into 5-6 segments. For example, if you want history students to learn about Eleanor Roosevelt, you might divide a short biography of her into stand-alone segments on:
   (1) Her childhood, (2) Her family life with Franklin and their children, (3) Her life after Franklin contracted polio, (4) Her work in the White House as First Lady, and (5) Her life and work after Franklin's death.
4) Assign each student to learn one segment, making sure students have direct access only to their own segment.
5) Give students time to read over their segment at least twice and become familiar with it. There is no need for them to memorize it.

6) Form temporary "expert groups" by having one student from each jigsaw group join other students assigned to the same segment. Give students in these expert groups time to discuss the main points of their segment and to rehearse the presentations they will make to their jigsaw group.

7) Bring the students back into their jigsaw groups.

8) Ask each student to present her or his segment to the group. Encourage others in the group to ask questions for clarification.

9) Float from group to group, observing the process. If any group is having trouble (e.g. a member is dominating or disruptive), intervene in the appropriate manner. Eventually, it's best for the group leader to handle this task. Leaders can be trained by whispering an instruction on how to intervene, until the leader gets the hang of it.

10) At the end of the session, give a quiz on the material so that students quickly come to realize that these sessions are not just fun and games but really matter (Aronson 1978).

The essence of the method lies in the fact that everybody receives a certain slice of the curriculum on a particular day, and by questioning one another about their lessons, they put together the whole curriculum. They need one another's help in order to complete the whole image. In this situation, they do not want to point out the other students' weaknesses. On the contrary, they need to know the other students' good qualities, since they have to harmonize their activity. Stereotypes have begun to fade. Children have become more friendly and more empathetic, and they can understand one another much better because while they were solving problems, it was important for them to pay attention to one another.

Multicultural – Intercultural Education

The two concepts are often alternately used, occasionally in a ways that are synonymous with each other. That is why in the specialist literature, several experts have already tried to resolve this situation: "*From the*

concepts of multiculturalism/interculturalism, nowadays the concept of in-
terculturalism is only used by the European specialized literature when it
comes to dynamics, namely the interaction between cultures, education and
socialization. Consequently, it comes to intercultural education and educa-
tional policy rather than multiculturalism. However, the concept of multi-
culturalism is used to characterize the given situation of the society, namely
to express the fact that a lot of kinds of cultures live together in society" (For-
rai 2003, p. 22). In Hungary in the middle of the 2000s, it was possible to
elaborate special and cross-programmes. Multicultural-intercultural ed-
ucation also came to the fore, and on this occasion the programme which
related to higher education was elaborated by a team.

The subject has the following objectives:

– during training, we must enable students to become familiar with
  the origins and phenomena of social tension, and how to handle
  these problems.
– we must prepare students to relieve mutual aversion and mis-
  trust which can be traced back to belonging to different ethnic,
  religious and social groups, and how to improve mutual under-
  standing and solidarity.
– we must make our students realize that in Hungarian public ed-
  ucation the largest domestic minority are the Gypsies, and to
  make the relationship between the Gypsies and the mainstream
  society more harmonious is a common interest. Therefore, they
  have to broaden their knowledge about the Gypsies' history, tra-
  ditions and habits which they are supposed to build into their ed-
  ucational work during the integrated education of non-Roma and
  Gypsy children.

I think the third objective is not only relevant to Hungarian public
education. In the neighbouring countries, a significant number of Gypsy
children are also involved in public education, which increasingly raises
the issue of elaborating and refining the methodology of integrated ed-
ucation.

The content of the subject of Multicultural-Intercultural Education can be summarized as the result of the project in the following ways:

- Cultural diversity in European states; the historical roots of national, religious and cultural heterogeneity: migration, conquest, migrant ethnic groups, refugees and the groups of settled employees, etc.
- Standpoints, disputes in connection with the concept of multiculturalism and interculturalism, the social and educational policy of the coexistence between ethnic groups of different cultural traditions.
- The attitude of mainstream society's members to minority groups of different cultural traditions: their receptivity and proclivity to exclude. The phenomenon of prejudices, their possible causes and consequences. The perpetuation of aggression and conflicts between "*foreigners*" and the members of mainstream society, the increase of social defencelessness and segregation at the settlement level.
- The receptive and cooperative attitude, the conditions of communication between cultures. The resources and manners of familiarization with different traditions. Library, museum and multimedia resources.
- Pedagogic procedures in the service of intercultural education. The continuous familiarization with laws.
- On the basis of historical and ethnographic works, films as well as exhibitions, inquiry about the history, spiritual and material culture, traditions of Gypsies, their social groups and about the creation of Gypsy artists.
- Personal inquiry about some traits of the culture, language, traditions and family education in a Gypsy family.
- The study of non-Roma and Gypsy children's integrated education in a selected kindergarten and school. The efficient methods of integrated education. Conflicts, the possibilities and methods of conflict management.

The subject is also associated with an external professional internship. This activity had to be performed in institutions dealing with Gypsy children (for example, Family Support Centres, the Welfare Department of the Mayor's Office), or it was possible for students to carry out their internship by visiting Gypsy families (HEFOP 2007).

By testing the programme, we can safely say that even if it did not fully achieve its goals, it still lived up to our expectations. Of course, the desired attitude did not take shape in every student; that is, there were several students who did not fulfil the objectives, but there were some other students who managed to become close to Gypsy culture. According to them, they succeeded in learning a lot of interesting things which they had not previously understood, but that they now knew why and what the Gypsy people were doing. In addition to becoming familiar with their culture, other students became emotionally closer to Gypsy children. Their prejudices soon disappeared, and their affection created feelings of pleasure, since by experiencing love and goodwill, the children's attitudes significantly changed. Unil then, the stubborn, undisciplined and arrogant children endeavoured to get closer to their teachers. The appreciation and care which the children had not experienced until then were important for them.

Conclusion

Many people believe that if in pedagogy more and more discoveries are revealed, they must be followed slavishly. Of course, there are novelties, which are induced by social, political and economic changes, and they cannot be ignored**.** However, it may increase the efficiency of our work if from the specialist literature we only give credence to valuable and well-argued writings based on proven foreign and domestic experiences. It is important that the practicing teachers should have confidence in themselves, the results of their work and in all the methods which they have refined for many years. It is important for us to know the specialist literature, but having consulted our professionally reliable colleagues'

opinion, we have to interpret the facts described filtered through our own experiences. Sometimes we can reject some of the ideas, but the useful ones must be incorporated into our work.

It is this way that we must act with the diverse multicultural literature as well. Let us compare our experiences to those in regions where several nationalities have lived together for centuries. In Hungary there are quite a few such settlements whose inhabitants certainly know more about multiculturalism than the specialists who can only write about it. But we cannot say that we have nothing to do in this respect. Those reflexes supposedly proven long ago do not always work, and the world around us is constantly changing. It is therefore important to collect information from abroad on successful attempts at multiculturization, and we should try to adapt these successful approaches as well. In spite of the fact that there are also a number of unresolved issues abroad (let us think of the Belgians, the Spaniards and the French, etc.) let us be receptive. Let us combine the best methods from other countries to the values of our confined region, let us compare them to our socially recognized colleagues' experiences, and by gradually observing their effects let us try to introduce them to our work.

During multicultural education, it is a basic task that should enable students to develop competences by which they may get to know and cooperate with multicultural groups of different traditions, which sometimes follow other values as well. It is important that we should make it possible for children to communicate with other groups which may help them accept cultural differences and otherness, and behave in tolerant ways. Multicultural education may prevent certain groups from becoming marginalized, and as a result of this, occasional violent conflicts could be avoided, as well. In school, it is necessary to make it unambiguous for everyone (no matter which group they may belong to) that the relationship between the minority and mainstream society must be harmonized, since mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence must be regarded as a natural claim of society.

Bibliography:

Aronson, E., The jigsaw classroom. Sage Publications, 1978. <www.jigsaw.org> [2012. 10. 09. 19.00]

James A. Banks – Cherry McGee Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education.* Jossey-Bass, San Francisco 2001.

Berkes Lilla: *A multikulturalizmus fogalmának kialakulása és jelentése.* Délkelet--Európa – South-East Europe International Relations Quarterly, Vol. 1. No. 4. 2010. p.1–7.

Fiske Susan T., Hamilton David L., Bargh John A., *A társak és a társadalom megismerése.* Budapest, Osiris. 2006.

Forray R. Katalin-Hegedűs András, *Cigány gyerekek szocializációja.* (Socialization of Gypsy children) Aula Kiadó, Budapest 1998.

Forray R. Katalin, *A multikulturális /interkulturális nevelésről.* (About Multicultural/Intercultural Education). Iskolakultúra 6–7. 2003. p. 18–27.

Kállai Ernő - Kovács László (szerk.): *Megismerés és elfogadás.* Pedagógiai kihívások és roma közösségek a 21. század iskolájában. (Cognition and Acceptance) Nyitott Könyvműhely, Budapest 2009.

Lipcsei Imre: *Multikulturalizmus az oktató-nevelő munkában.* (Multikulturalism in Education) In: Tanulmányok – Studii. (Lipcsei I. szerk.): Szent István Egyetem Pedagógiai Kar – Partiumi Keresztény Egyetem, Szarvas – Nagyvárad 2010, p. 19–34.

Mihály Ildikó, *A multikulturális nevelésről – a világban.(*About Multicultural Education in the World). Új Pedagógiai Szemle, 4. 2001. p. 58–65.

Mikael Luciak, *Minority schooling and intercultural education*: A comparison of recent developments in the old and new EU member states. *Intercultural Education,* 2006. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14675980 500502370> [2012.10.12, 21.00]

Tusa Cecilia, *A multikulturális nevelés létjogosultsága és szükségessége az Európai Unióban.* (The Justification and the Need of Multicultural Education in the European Union). <http://www.osztalyfonok.hu/cikk.php?id=221> [2012. 10.09, 18.15]

Szabó László Tamás, *Kisebbségek európai oktatási rendszerekben: kihívás és válaszkísérletek.* (Minorities in European Educational Systems: A Challenge and Attempts to Respond to It). Új Pedagógiai szemle 11. 1994. p. 94–101.

Torgyik Judit. *Multikulturális társadalom, multikulturális nevelés*. (Multicultural so-
        ciety, multicultural education). Új Pedagógiai Szemle, 4-5. (2004) p. 4–14.
Torgyik Judit – Karlovitz János, *Multikulturális nevelés*.(Multicultural Education).
        Budapest 2006.
 http://europa.eu/documentation/legislation/index_hu.htm [2012.10.01. 21. 00]

Note: The titles of the above-mentioned works have been translated from Hungarian into English by the translator of this essay.

Abstract:

The social and cultural environment of kindergartens and schools has experienced considerable changes during the past few decades. This greatly affected teachers as well, since children with a wide range of economic, cultural and family backgrounds bring with them contrasting moral values to preschools or elementary schools. Children of migrant workers, refugees, immigrants lead to increased diversity which requires new competences from teachers. The notion of incorporating multiculturalism in today's schools is beyond question. Therefore education policy should significantly prioritize the inclusion of cultural varieties: different religions, diverse traditions and customs.

Keywords: multiculturalism, inclusion, receptivity, tolerance, identity, tradition, integration

Information about the author:
Prof. Imre Lipcsei, PhD
Szent István University Faculty of Applied Arts and Pedagogy
H5540 Szarvas, Szabadság út 4. Hungary
Prof. Imre Lipcsei, PhD is Dean of the Faculty of Applied Arts and Pedagogy, Szent István University. He teaches the following courses: History of Education, Didactics, Comparative Education, Multicultural Knowledge. His research focuses on Education of Romany children, and multicultural education in preschools and elementary schools. He is the president of the Association of Teachers and of Kindergarten Teachers.

contact address:

H5540 Szarvas, Szabadság út 4. Hungary

phone number: +36 66 311 592

e-mail: lipcsei.imre@abpk.szie.hu