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## **Applying Multicultural Education at School, or How to Lead Pupils to Tolerance**

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### **Introduction**

Multiculture is a part of today's life. Pupils in their school environment meet other pupils who come from different ethnic groups or nations. Their classmates might be Hungarian, Roma, Czech, but also French or Korean. Multicultural education should prepare pupils for the possibility that in the future they might coexist with members of other nations, with people of other cultures, habits or religions.

In this article we primarily deal with multicultural education itself, then with a pedagogue who teaches multicultural education, and also with a pupil who is a part of the educational process. We will then focus on the acceptance of chosen nationalities by future pedagogues, and we will present the appropriate methods which should be used during the educational process which is aimed towards multicultural education.

### **Multicultural education**

*"Multicultural education is included in the curriculum with respect to the cultural environment where people of different ethnic, national, religious or cultural origins were coexisting for centuries. Traditional cultural diversity is currently still deepening through trends which are often commonly referred to as globalisation. One of these trends, which significantly enhances the*

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*diversity of cultures in Slovakia, is the migration of members of remote and which are today unknown cultures and subcultures" (ISCED 1 – primary education, 2008, p. 22).*

Multicultural education in our school system is very important in order to prepare pupils for the fact that not all people are the same. Part of multicultural education is not only to know other nations and their cultures, but also to be interested in one's own culture, history, heritage of their ancestors. Another part of Multicultural education is also an area of coexistence in the past and in the present.

The subject of multicultural education is cultural diversity. Multicultural education doesn't deal with any differences or similarities in the human world and it doesn't cultivate tolerance to any difference or promote cooperation with different people. Multicultural education primarily deals with different cultures (Mistrík and col., 2008).

Pupils come into contact with the differences of others depending on the area (region) of Slovakia where they live; whether grow up in a town or in a village, how are they raised by their close relatives, and also the wider social environment.

According to M. Mistrík et al. (2008), the main reasons for the promotion of multicultural education in schools are:

- the necessity to contribute to the peaceful coexistence of the majority and the so called older minority, as well as the willingness to support peaceful integration of the so-called newer minority into society;
- globalisation of economy, politics and media;
- variability and volatility of current European society in which cultural contacts are still altering;
- the decades of ideological, geographical and political reticence of Slovakian society;
- the inevitability of redefining the cultural identity of Slovakia, Slovaks, Hungarians, Roma, Ruthenians and the other inhabitants of the Slovak Republic in the new geopolitical situation;
- the latent racism that persists in a large part of the Slovak society;

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- pedagogues who didn't have the opportunity to obtain enough skills to solve problems arising from relationships of cultures;
  - even in pedagogues, we can still observe stereotypical perceptions of other cultures and a prejudiced way of evaluating pupils.

During a cross-cutting theme (multicultural education), which is a part of the educational process, pupils learn how to live with other cultures.

The coexistence of many cultures is sometimes very difficult. To understand, and to put yourself into someone else's shoes is not easy. Multicultural education helps a pupil since childhood to perceive differences and accept other people.

### **The role of the pedagogue in multicultural education**

In multicultural education, pupils become acquainted with knowledge they already possess from primary education. A teacher at the first grade of elementary school knows his/her pupils, and teaches them the majority of subjects (or all subjects) in their class. An experienced teacher is able to estimate what knowledge pupils possess in the area of multicultural education. Gradually, he/she discovers the extent of their knowledge and broadens his/her pupils' knowledge horizon.

The area of skills and attitudes of a pedagogue in relation to multi-culture:

- to be able to communicate and live with members of other socio-cultural groups, to be aware of one's rights, but at the same time respect the rights of others (positive assertivity);
- he/she should be able to show his/her own identity (who I am),
- know his/her own cultural background (where I come from);
- by his/her actions influence the value system which will have an influence on children's behaviour, by teaching them how prejudices and stereotypes influence the relationship between the

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majority and minority, and also with foreigners (Dúbravcová, in Šoltéssová, eds. 2006).

A pedagogue of multicultural education should be a model of behaviour for his/her pupils; he/she should accept each child regardless of nationality or religion; he/she should adopt a human approach towards children, adolescents, and also adults; he/she should have natural authority in a classroom with pupils and also in communication with parents; he/she should know the history and culture of Slovakia; he/she should be mature when choosing the appropriate methods in the application of multicultural education in primary education; he/she should be creative and spontaneous; it is also important for him/her to be open to new approaches and to respond to them, and last but not least he/she should be self-critical and aware of his/her deficiencies, prejudices and eliminate them.

### **The pupil in multicultural education**

A child raised in a multicultural society is primarily led to social awareness and corresponding behaviour. To develop these skills, the following factors are important:

- alignment (expression of warm-heartedness, empathy, support);
- paying attention (this relates to ordinary things, such as looking at a child, listening to what he/she wants to say; accompanying him/her in his/her activities);
- acceptance (acceptance and respect for a child for who he/she is);
- understanding a child's needs (a small child depends on his/her parents to satisfy his/her needs, on his/her sensitivity to what he/she needs, how his/her needs can be satisfied);
- leaving space and defining limits (do not limit children, but at the same time insist on the following rules, as far as is necessary, etc.) (Bednářová – Šmardová, 2007).

During the educational process, pupils become acquainted not only with the culture of another nation or ethnic group, but also their language, the location of the original country, its food, children's interests, etc. Pupils obtain basic cultural literacy at home and in pre-primary education. Primary education, by the means of an educational process with the assistance of a teacher, provides pupils with the opportunity to enhance their current knowledge base.

### **Nationalities living in Slovakia**

Slovakia is a small country, but at the same time, it is rich in different ethnic groups and nationalities. After 1989, Slovakia became a refuge for many migrant families. Slovakia is not only the final destination for refugees, it is also a rather transitory territory. Apart from nationalities which live in Slovakia only temporarily, there are also nationalities which have already lived in this territory for several decades. Since the separation of the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic, there have been three censuses in Slovakia, the third of which took place two years ago (see Table 1). After last census (2011) we can see that the biggest minority living in Slovakia is the Hungarian nationality, the second is the Roma nationality and the third is the Ruthenian nationality.

Different minority groups live in many parts of Slovakia. Therefore in schools, we have several minorities represented to a greater or lesser extent among the pupils.

The perception and acceptance of diversity of pupils' cultural groups also depends on the perception and acceptance of minorities by teachers.

We investigated the acceptance of minorities by primary education teachers. To conduct this research, we used a questionnaire devised by J. Průcha (2011); this was called Questionnaire to identify factors which shape attitudes towards foreigners and other groups, developed by P. Saka and K. Saková (2004). In this original questionnaire, the objects of investigation are foreigners, Jews and Roma.

**Table 1. Population of the Slovak Republic  
according to different national groups in 2011, 2001, 1991  
(Censuses of population and housing, 2012)**

Resident population (according to permanent residence) together	Slovak Republic					
	2011		2001		1991	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
	5 397 036	100	5 379 455	100	5 274 335	100
<b>Nationality</b>						
Slovak	4 352 775	80,7	4 614 854	85,8	4 519 328	85,7
Hungarian	458 467	8,5	520 528	9,7	567 296	10,8
Roma	105 738	2	89 920	1,7	75 802	1,4
Ruthenian	33 482	0,6	24 201	0,4	17 197	0,3
Czech	30 367	0,6	44 620	0,8	52 884	1
Ukrainian	7 430	0,1	10 814	0,2	13 281	0,3
German	4 690	0,1	5 405	0,1	5 414	0,1
Moravian	3 286	0,1	2 348	0	6 037	0,1
Polish	3 084	0,1	2 602	0	2 659	0,1
Russian	1 997	0	1 590	0	1 389	0
Bulgarian	1 051	0	1 179	0	1 400	0
Croatian	1 022	0	890	0	x	x
Serbian	698	0	434	0	x	x
Jewish	631	0	218	0	134	0
other	9 825	0,2	5 350	0,1	2 732	0,1
undetected	382 493	7	54 502	1	8 782	0,2

X – wasn't evaluated

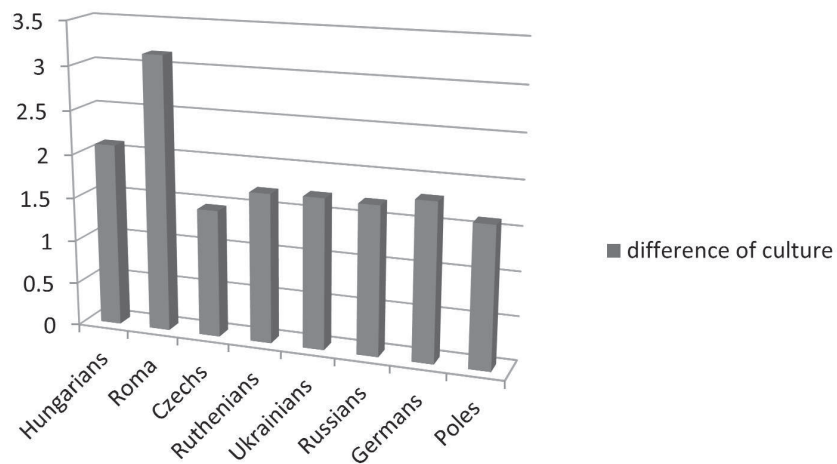
We adjusted this questionnaire to minorities living in the Slovak Republic. Students of Pre-school and Elementary Pedagogy, internal and external, had to answer how individual factors (listed below) influence their attitudes towards Hungarians, Roma, Czechs, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Russians, Germans, and Poles. They expressed the intensity of influence by using a five-point rating scale, in which 1 = doesn't influence at all, 5 = definitely influences.

**Table 2. Acceptance of differences of minorities**

minority	difference of culture	difference of value situations
Hungarians	2,1	2,02
Roma	3,15	3,31
Czechs	1,46	1,71
Ruthenians	1,71	1,7
Ukrainians	1,72	1,74
Russians	1,7	1,78
Germans	1,8	1,76
Poles	1,61	1,7

Table 2 shows that future teachers perceive that the Czech (1,46 %) and Polish (1,61 %) nationalities as being the closest minorities in terms of culture. The Roma (3,15 %) and Hungarian (2,1 %) minorities are perceived as being the most different (see Graph 1).

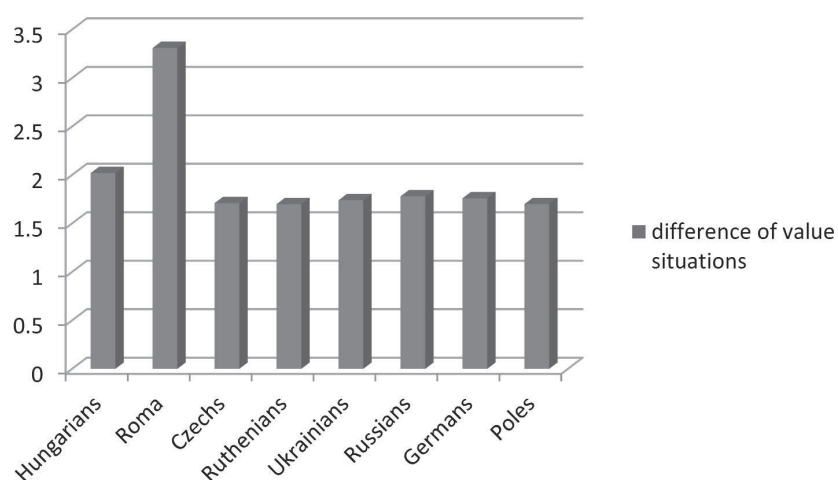
**Graph 1. Acceptance of differences of minorities, difference of culture**



In terms of the differences in value situations, future teachers accept the smallest difference in Ruthenians (1,7 %) and Poles (1,7 %), and the

biggest difference in value situations they see in Roma (3,31 %) and Hungarians (2,02 %) (see Graph 2).

**Graph 2. Acceptance of differences of minorities, difference of value situations**



The results show us that future pedagogues, who will teach multicultural education, sympathise more with Slavonic nationalities than non-Slavonic ones. Similarity of culture, language and understanding of some of the chosen cultural elements can have an influence on the level of acceptance of the chosen nationalities.

### **Methods which lead to tolerance in an educational process**

A teacher in primary education alters his or her methods during the educational process in such way that they will engage pupils during multicultural education.

The following are especially suitable: activating, creative methods, which motivate children to be active in a group through games, staging,



celebrations, festivals; through dance, teaching of a foreign language; methods which relax and manage cognitive activity; which enhance an exploring and creative attitude; that enable creative expression, teach how to plan activities and estimate the consequences of all activities; form a sense of one's own individuality and difference; develop skills which enhance the creative potential of individuals; inform about basic social knowledge; shape the skills of active participation on all group activities (Karbowniczek and col., 2011).

Pupils, during the educational process which employs didactic games and also empirical, cooperative teaching, and during dramatisation, gained a greater understanding of other cultures, other habits and were more willing to accept others. To understand other people's actions is not so easy. Discussion helps, and also short clips from other cultures, objects that are characteristic of a given culture, clothes, food, ways of communicating, etc.

Applying the methods of multicultural education can be incorporated into any of the main subjects, or it can run through the whole educational process. Another option is to have an independent subject which will consist of the worked-out themes, e.g. we provide an introduction to one of the topics:

*Topic: Know yourself, know your friend.*

*Focus:* Development of elementary knowledge about people living in Slovakia and in Poland.

*Basic starting point:* folk traditions – habits, music and crafts in Slovakia and in Poland.

*Determination of the problem:* What legends are told in Slovakia and Poland.

*Description of the problem:* With regard to the fact that we live in Slovakia, children should know the habits and traditions of Slovakia and Poland, to acquire elementary knowledge, and at the same time we should foster in them tolerance and acceptance of different cultures, and we should prevent formation of racial prejudices.

*General objectives:*

- Being able to recognize basic cultural differences.

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- Improve psycho-motoric competencies of children.
  - Develop positive pro-social empathy of children.

During our joint work in multicultural education (adjusted according to Kožuchová, 2011) we should see to it that children:

- agree on defining the rules for work in groups, in pairs, and at the same time they respect these rules;
- learn natural tolerance and also responsibility for fulfilling tasks;
- are able (when needed) to ask for help, either from another child, or the pedagogue, or some other adult in the nursery school;
- are willing to help their friends or children from another classroom according to their abilities;
- communicate, and this communication takes place in a pleasant atmosphere;
- are able to present the results of their work and at the same time are able to accept an evaluation from others.

### **Conclusions**

Multicultural education is inevitable at our schools. Pupils during the educational process, together with their teacher, discover common and different features of the minority and majority parts of society. They use all available resources. It is advisable to deal with the language of a given minority, and to learn several expressions, e.g. songs. In multicultural education it is also good when pupils use all their senses when learning.

The research that we conducted was focused on future teachers of primary education. We investigated their acceptance of the differences of minorities. We consider it important to identify the attitudes of teachers (or future teachers) because the teacher is a person who influences pupils not only during the educational process but also beyond it. A teacher of multicultural education should not have prejudices.

When teaching multicultural education, he/she should present topics without prejudice and use adequately chosen methods.

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Each teacher undertakes an individual approach during primary education within the framework of developing the cultural literacy of the other nation.

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**Abstract:**

Multicultural education is a cross-cutting theme in the state educational programme ISCED 1 – primary education. In primary education, multicultural education can be taught as a separate subject or it can be included in other ongoing subjects. When applying multicultural education it is also important that the teacher doesn't have prejudices against any ethnic group or nationality. He/she should also use appropriate methods that lead to pupils becoming more tolerant.

**Keywords:** Multicultural Education, Tolerance, Coexistence, Primary Education, Methodics.

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