



## OPPORTUNITIES OF THE INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN TEACHING-LEARNING HISTORY

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**Abstract:** No one disputes today the fact that, for centuries, the diversity of traditions and cultures has been one of the major assets of both Europe and Romania, and that during the past decades the principle of tolerance has become the guarantee of a European open society aware of the importance of its cultural diversity. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, in Romania and elsewhere, we need to shift the focus of tolerance from the social and political realm towards the field of human relations, because in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the concept of tolerance seems to be insufficient and limited. Thus, we need to move from a tolerant co-existence to an active collaboration (the most significant mutation should involve the replacement of “I tolerate” by “I respect”). First and foremost, this requires a knowledge of the past, and only then concrete practical and pragmatic actions. Of course, under these circumstances the education of both young people and adults plays a crucial role, as the majority must truly understand the problems of the minorities and accept and support the manifestation of their ethnic identity, by protecting their culture, religion, education, and languages. Therefore, both the authorities and the civil society must become involved in fighting discrimination and in the elimination of any form of extremism, chauvinism, anti-Semitism or territorial separatism, in supporting cultural diversity and in encouraging interethnic dialogue, in the development of civic multiculturalism as a part of the European identity. The paper proposes to emphasize on intercultural education during history lessons, insisting on the idea that intercultural education is not a new discipline taught in school, but an instrument through which the teacher uses the knowledge of his discipline in order to make the student sensitive to diversity and human solidarity. Approaching history from the perspective of intercultural education does not mean supplementary acquisitions, but emphasizing and resizing the permanent knowledge accumulation of a good professional. At the same time, the comparative study of history through an intercultural perspective leads to a better understanding by the students of the relation between the universal and the particular. History is an endless and extremely generous source of intercultural education which starts from the mere knowledge of the people’s civilizations over the time and expands towards interpreting the consequences of intolerance, racism, xenophobia etc. The past offers the present a historical perspective and solutions for the future.

**Key words:** intercultural education, history, tolerance and respect, Romania

### 1. Introduction

The necessity of economic reconstruction after World War II stimulated the technical and technological development and imposed rapid plans for the economic development. This brought about not only excessive industrialization, harmful to the environment and humans, but also the degradation of the system of values. The future world – with the ever-present computers, robots and other informative instruments – would require abilities which until then were mere options: creativity, respect, ethics etc. (Gardner, 2007). In the last two decades of the twentieth century, the breach between scientists and humanistic scholars drew public attention. It determined reactions and interventions which materialized not only in the cultural and educational segment, but also in the documents of the European Council. Education and teaching have an essential role in changing the value system and introducing a balance between technological and humanist forces. This is why, it

was no accident that the *International Commission for Education in the Twenty-First Century* was officially created in 1993. It was financed by UNESCO and assisted in its activities by a Secretariat from among the members of the organization. The *Commission* took advantage of UNESCO's resources and experience, as well as of the impressive information gathered by UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (Delors, 2000).

## 2. Concepts and Fundamentals

The report from the *International Commission for Education in the Twenty-First Century* took advantage of past experiences and pointed out that traditional solutions for educational necessities are no longer adequate to the actual situation of the twenty-first century. These traditional solutions have a predominantly quantitative character and rely exclusively on knowledge,

It is not enough that each child accumulate from an early age a quantity of knowledge, but each individual has to be prepared to take advantage of learning opportunities and innovate, because the aim of education is innovation (Marga, 2005). Therefore, education has to be organized with a view to four types of learning fundamentals, which are the pillars of knowledge:

- Learn to know (which does not mean the accumulation of information, but gaining the instruments of knowledge)
- Learn to do (do what you know how to)
- Learn to live together with others (accept diversity)
- Learn to be (meaning be responsible, build and develop your own personality, your own civic duty etc.) (Delors, 2000).

Also, in order to give individuals human values and creative initiatives besides the cognitive spectrum, H. Gardner proposes the cultivation of five mental types. These types are utilizations of the mind that can be formed at school, in one's profession or at one's work place (Gardner, 2007, p. 11sq):

- *The disciplined mind*: a distinct way of cognition which characterizes a certain academic discipline, a profession;
- *The systematic mind*: it takes information from different sources, understands and evaluates it, assembling it in order to make up meaning for the person that synthesizes it and also for other people;
- *The creative mind*: innovative, bringing new ideas, asking unusual questions, it invents new ways of thinking, reaching unexpected answers;
- *The respectful mind*: it observes and accepts differences between individuals and human groups, it tries to understand the "others" and work effectively with them;
- *The ethical mind*: it reflects on the nature of the individual's work and on the needs and the desires of the society the individual lives in.

In an analytical report of the South Korean educational system, Myong Won Suhr, former minister of education and director of the Commission for the Reform of the South Korean educational system, notices a reality which we can consider valid for other educational systems as well. Due to the rapid progress in science and technology, education has gained significantly. However, from a qualitative point of view, education has a lot of drawbacks, the ethical dimension of education has become more pale. That is why, educational institutions from South Korea have changed their plans and programs drastically and are now paying less importance to the economic-development-orientated education (i.e. science and technology). They insist on the humanist-and-social-training-oriented educational system that gets closer to perennial human values (Myong Won Suhr, 2000, p. 204). A pertinent conclusion can be drawn from this analysis, a conclusion that is valid for Romania as well: the necessity of a different approach to educational values, giving them new dimensions according to the necessities and the challenges of the twenty-first century. We need science and technology, but we equally need a system of knowledge from the social-cultural sphere. As technology and science become more

sophisticated and advanced, they cannot replace human mind and creativity. Science and technology can only offer us devices for work, communication, movement etc., but they are far from being able to offer us solutions for living with the others, for arguments and conflicts, for negotiation or communication other humans etc.

A new concept has appeared in the scholarship on the field: “sustainable human development”. Previous experience proves that a lot of attention should be paid to integrating knowledge and values in order to create a more humanistic society, reach a higher degree of responsibility, and stimulate our capacities to enjoy life together (Kornhauser, 2000).

Tolerance is another debated and even controversial concept. Historically, this concept has had various definitions and applications in different locations and times. Transylvania (now a province of Romania) became known in Europe at the end of the sixteenth century as “the land of religious tolerance”. Four religious denominations were officially recognized here: Roman-Catholicism, Calvinism, Lutheranism, and Unitarianism. In a time when the religious wars between the Catholics and the Protestants tore up most of Europe, the religious tolerance model in Transylvania seemed ideal. However, the Romanians, the majority of the population of the province, who were Orthodox, were kept outside the system of four official religions. Or another example: the Edict of Tolerance issued by Emperor Joseph II of Austria in 1781 maintained the primacy of the Roman-Catholic religion in the Habsburg Empire, but also allowed free worship. The edict lifted religious restrictions when one applied for a position, in towns, guilds, or when buying property. It opened the way to all of these for the Romanians as well. From a religious point of view the Romanians were Orthodox or Greek-Catholic. (After 1700, a segment of the Romanian Orthodox population from Transylvania accepted the religious Union with Rome and they became Greek-Catholics). The Edict met resistance in Transylvania. The Emperor was forced to give further explanations that tolerance did not affect, at all, the dominant position of Roman-Catholicism, i.e. it only meant lifting the restrictions imposed until then on people who were not Catholic and it did not mean the liberty to change one’s religion. (This meaning particularly targeted the Romanian Greek-Catholics who re-converted to Orthodox). Furthermore, between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, the notion of “tolerated nationality”, as it was used when referring to the Romanians in Transylvania, was not synonymous with the freedoms and liberties of other ethnic groups in the Habsburg Empire. In the twentieth century, the significance of the notion of tolerance shifted from the social and the political to interpersonal relationships. However, for the twenty-first century, this notion proves to be insufficient and narrow and there is need to shift from tolerant coexistence to active collaboration; the expression “I tolerate” should be replaced with the expression “I respect” (Kornhauser, 2000).

In order to avoid the manipulation of beliefs in education, it is necessary to work in two directions. On the one hand, we must increase using science, objective observation, and the exact data that are difficult to fake. On the other hand, we must highlight the global cultural values which go beyond mere tolerance and cultivate the acceptance of cultural diversity. The two directions must be equally integrated into programs for the protection of bio-diversity. Cultural diversity protection needs to become an essential component of all curricula focusing on permanent education (Kornhauser, 2000).

### 3. Intercultural education and history

The individual’s positive creative and qualitative behavior and creative actions will be visible when education gives up its predominantly quantitative character and pays more attention to quality and the four pillars of knowledge (to know, to do, to live with the others, to be). In this regard, *interculturality* is a challenge for education. Intercultural education is not a new subject matter in school, but an extension of the curriculum. It should not require learning, burdening the students with new knowledge and new information. Intercultural education should be a tool, a strategy, through which the teacher, using the knowledge of his/her subject matter, will highlight the respect for diversity, tolerance, and human solidarity and will make students resonant to these values.

The main objective of intercultural education is teaching young people to perceive, accept, respect, and experiment alterity in order to facilitate the meeting with *the other*. Intercultural education supports the reorientation of perception, thought, sense, and action so that one should be more tolerant,

and also accept and respect the other, who is different. We should definitely keep in mind that intercultural education is not a new subject matter. Nor is it an extension of the “teaching cultures” curriculum. The teacher will mostly use the content of his/her own subject to reach new objectives which are part of European civic education, human rights, the preparation and the participation in social life, as well as the education for democratic citizenship. From the intercultural point of view, most of the times when the FOREIGNER enters the community, it is not the students who find it hard to accept him/her. It is the educational institution, the community, the school, and the teachers who have difficulties adapting to cultural diversity. In order to avoid stereotypes and prejudice, the tendencies to marginalization, isolation, and forced assimilation, what counts is the attitude projected by the teacher through his/her behavior (Dasen, Perregaux, Rey, 1999).

Intercultural education should not be something scary for teachers, because it does not mean further acquisitions, but it entails the valorization and the redesign of the materials already accumulated, which a good professional and educator constantly does. Without doubt, it is not enough that the teacher should re-valorize his/her competence. It is also necessary that an educational and legislative policy based on open and permissive rules should be promoted. Subjects and curricula should also be regarded from the perspective of interculturalism. If official rules are delayed, - I believe that the current curriculum, unlike the traditional one, allows the teacher greater mobility - the teacher’s own decisions in the evaluation of the teaching-learning process can be a first step in the advancement and development of the educational side of his/her discipline.

The scholarship on the field includes a variety of perspectives and analyses of the term interculturality. For example, the “cultural iceberg” model represents an illustrative structure of the components of culture only visible in small proportion (art, folklore, food, and clothes). These aspects are supported by a strong foundation situated “under the sea level” (the group’s perspective on relations, friendship, beauty, modesty, ideas about raising children, the concept of justice, leadership, decisions making patterns, problem solving models, the conception about time, space, future, and present, role distribution in a relationship, age, gender, class, occupation, body language, gestures etc.) (Nedelcu, 2008).

The education and the competence of a history teacher are, undoubtedly, necessary for the education of young people in order to accept diversity. History is a never ending and extremely generous source for intercultural education. It starts from the mere knowledge of civilizations in time and extends to the interpretation of the consequences of intolerance, xenophobia, racism, irredentism, revisionism etc. The past offers the present a historic perspective, a perspective of the future, sometimes even solutions for the future. History helps students not only to know civilizations, it also to offer them competence to analyze and interpret relationships connecting events in time, identify causes and reflect on effects. Students need to be taught to make connections between the present, the past, and the future, placing the present in a historical perspective. The students will be advised to look at societies and see how future life standards rely on yesterday’s and today’s problems and on the way in which they are solved. In addition, the comparative study of history from an intercultural perspective makes students understand better the relation between the general and the specific, the advantages of ethnic decentralization and the new perspective obtained through the projection of “the other”.

In Recommendation 15 (2001) on teaching history in Europe in the twenty-first century, a document adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the European Council, a new notion is used: the “European dimension in teaching history”. This calls for changing the attitude towards history as a subject in school. It diversifies the scope of teaching and learning history. According to the European document, teaching history in a democratic Europe “should be a main concern in the education of responsible citizens actively involved in political life and in cultivating respect for the differences between peoples, while relying on national identity and the principle of tolerance” (Annex to the Recommendation no. 15/2001). Therefore, it becomes more important to answer the questions HOW? and WHY? we teach and learn history, and not to insist on the questions WHAT? and HOW MUCH? we teach, learn, and assess history. Even though these syntagms have turned into clichés: the twentieth century as the century of speed, the twenty-first century as the century of information, they refer to a reality that we cannot ignore. The content becomes harder and harder to teach and it is important that the student learns more what to do and less and less theory. “The well stuffed head”, the objective to

the transitive-normative model, leaves room for the “well formed head”. “To know to be”, “to know to become”, “to know to live” take over as complementary educational objectives besides and sometimes instead of the categorical “to know everything” (Cosmovici, Iacob, 1999, p. 288). As a consequence, we should think about the following question: what should a young person still know from the history lessons five or ten years after he/she leaves school? Or why not, during his/her entire life? (Stradling, 2002). Teaching experience, research and - why not? - even television polls prove that most people, regardless their age, remember little information, not only from history, but also from other school subjects. Taking this reality into consideration, according to European documents and according to Robert Stradling, the European Council consultant for the reform of history teaching in Central and Eastern Europe, students need to learn:

- A scientific concept of history
- An explanation of the forces which brand century in history, the dynamics of change, the connections between what happens in a place and another
- Understanding of the factors that influenced and shaped their lives and identity
- Abilities for critical thinking
- Positive attitudes and values, including tolerance, respect for diversity, open mindedness towards the others, the belief that value judgments, conclusions, and opinions must be explained using rational proof (Stradling, 2002).

Museum history, evenemential history, history like a glorious and triumphal march, all these are no longer adequate in this millennium and century. The challenges with which is confronted this school subject force us to reach out for the educational role of history, for the development, mostly, of competences which can be transformed into operational objective forms in all school cycles and not only in high school. The new curricula for teaching-learning history do take into account the new recommendations of the European Council, the new tendencies in historical research, and the new principle of learning history: the many-sided perspective. Even more, curricula offer teachers of history more flexibility in choosing the content with a view to their students, school, and community where pupils, parents, and teacher belong. Nowadays, when learning history, students can acquire and develop competences and abilities in communication, analysis of information resources, critical thinking etc. because in any profession one needs to know techniques for communication, research, information, and negotiation. Even more, one needs to accept diversity and differences within an ethnic, a social, and a political group.

All of these can be found, for example, in the history curriculum for the 11<sup>th</sup> grade (a much debated curriculum) where the four competences refer to the efficient use of communication and of specialized language, the practice of democratic and civic approaches and actions, applying principles and methods adequate to approaching the historic sources, using resources that encourage continuous education. In the chapter on values and attitudes it is clearly specified that history means education for citizenship and democratic values. This means acquiring democratic attitudes and behaviour such as: coherence and rigour in thinking and action, critical and flexible thinking, positive contacts with the others, respect for the fundamental human rights, ethnic, religious, and cultural tolerance etc. Studying the history of the twentieth century in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade sets new challenges for the teacher with a view to introducing new ideas and examples of teaching practices from the entire Europe, new methods of teaching and learning history. Consequently, didactic actions become more complex and more efficient (Stradling, 2002).

The curriculum for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade proposes ways of learning history which are to be appreciated. They do not focus on events only, neither to they count victories and defeats. The didactic content starts from family history, family celebrations, neighbours and community, yesterday's and today's childhood and it goes towards local history. The descent into history is gradual, starting from the milieu familiar to the child. This makes him/her notice differences, understand diversities, and respect the others, who lived differently and thought differently etc.

Furthermore, relying on the new perspective on history, the history teacher can develop and exercise his/her creativity, can free himself/herself from the canons of teaching and learning history traditionally, in a positivistic way, with too much information. Each history lesson has to become a challenge for a teacher, a creative act fully efficient in acquiring attitudes and values according to the European recommendations. The integration into a unique system of education does not mean giving up one's own national identity - as some misunderstand. Such an integration presupposes the development of traditions and not their preservation, which would isolate us not only from Europe, but from progress, modernity, and evolution in general.

#### 4. Conclusion

Forming an intercultural competence is a concern to everyone, should he/she belong to the majority or the minority. Such a competence is built steadily overcoming ethnocentricity and prejudice. Interculturalism does not mean the exclusion of patriotism, nor does it mean losing one's own culture while interacting with others (Nedelcu, 2008). Intercultural education means accepting differences and not denying them, "equal does not mean the same". Not making any differences may mean not having discriminatory behavior and this is correct, but ignoring and denying the other's identity, makes him/her invisible and this is not fair (Nedelcu, 2008).

The history teacher has at his/her disposal numerous possibilities to develop the formative and educative character of history as a subject in school. Each history lesson can be a good occasion for intercultural education, ecological education, civic education, democratic education, education for peace etc. One of the main qualities of history is exactly the generosity of its content and the never ending sources for education and training. The history teacher has the obligation and the duty to contribute to the youngsters' development so that they should integrate into European democracy and accept the concept of unique citizenship. To be a European citizen does not mean losing one's own identity or one's national identity, nor does it mean giving up one's traditions or religious convictions etc.

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