TOLERANCE TOWARDS CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION

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Abstract: Education for cultural diversity is needed for the counteraction of intolerant attitudes and acceptance of cultural diversity. This explicit recognition of the diversity in society as well as in educational establishments generates the need to reflect on the mission of educational system, but also to understand how these educational services deal with cultural diversity issues.

Keywords:*tolerance, education for tolerance, cultural diversity, cultural competence, attitudes towards cultural diversity.*

Current evolvement of contemporary society is characterized by globalization, computerization, on the one hand, and the continuous deepening of the spiritual crisis of moral disintegration of human personality, on the other hand, although the specialists in the field of education support the idea that the human being is worthy of respect, considering it "*spiritual and morally perfectible."* The value orientations of young generation oscillates between excessive values consumption and the need to produce values, possible only in the context of unity through diversity to achieve cultural tolerance values evoked through the orientation towards transcendence and productive/constructive interaction given the pluralism codes of human existence. For these reasons European policies promote today the values of tolerance favourable to integration, diversity and intercultural and interreligious dialogue, tackled by those who value the human wisdom and principle, on which the foundations of civilization and human values are built, tolerance being the language of construction and transmission of the culture in a multiculturalism conjuncture in Europe and interculturality, at national level [10]. Culture is one of the most controversial words in modern day as it differs from one individual to another, from time to time, from area to area, and is defined in many different ways in the specialized literature. In this context, culture is the acquired knowledge about life. It's a dynamic process that includes thoughts, values, customs, and beliefs that control most of the human actions [1, p. 103].

An education which requires knowledge and understanding of different religions, and of people who adhere to those traditions, requires pedagogical approaches that represent religious traditions fairly and accurately – including their diversity – and enables students to engage with the content of what they have studied at a personal level [9, p. 3-4].

The process of educational modernisation calls for the educationalists to build and develop their career in a multicultural environment by harnessing the principles of tolerance. Integrating through usage in the scientific community of the pedagogical tolerance concept and the development of its content through new elements and content is prevailing and it is influenced by the following factors: (a) the diversity of theoretical understanding of the concept in the specialized literature from different geographical areas;

(b) uncertain and specific nature of understanding the concept in local literature;

 (c) on-going expansion and reconsideration of the professional roles;

For these reasons it is important to educate the citizens in the spirit of interpersonal, multicultural and religious coexistence [3, p. 6].

Students should discern that the society can tolerate the diversity of people, groups and communities, without violating the balance between unity and diversity, because, although there are individual differences, people are to promote the values and fundamental principles of the society they live in, respect the laws and obey them. Nevertheless, as M. Maussen & V. Bader state, sometimes there may be good reasons not to tolerate a particular form of behaviour or a specific practice, and sometimes mere "toleration" may be seen as not enough because it entails a negative evaluation and a form of rejection of identities and practices that seem valuable and worthy of recognition to others. Sometimes what is asked for is not mere toleration, but genuine equal respect for differences in life-styles, in cultural expressions and practices, for different "conceptions of the good life" and different "comprehensive doctrines" [5, p. 21-22]. It is worth to mention in this context the contraries of tolerance which according to Geir A. can be results of several combinations: It can be:

a) intolerance: objection and rejection;
b1) indifference: no objection and acceptance;
b2) negative expediency: no objection and rejection;
c) favouritism: subscription and acceptance;
d) sacrifice: subscription plus rejection [4, p. 122]

The child is encouraged to form the ability to communicate (listen and speak) to take decisions based on the group values, to get involved in solving interpersonal problems. Teachers must pay attention to educating children to control their primary emotions and avoid clashes, nurturing children's self-respect, respect of others, and tolerance for different views. Tønnessen (1984) emphasizes the fact that if we are to bring up children to be tolerant, we must not approach them with indifferent forbearance; such irresoluteness will also affect the children. We must rather teach children by example what it means to live with a point of view and a sense of commitment. In practice, we must show them what genuine tolerance means. In this area, children must be given early training and role models. We must teach them to strike a balance between the indifference of relativism (neutrality) and the narrow-mindedness of fanaticism. We must give children the courage and the strength to have beliefs and opinions that unite commitment and openness in life and learning. People who are themselves committed to a belief are most capable of teaching the meaning of tolerance. They soon experience how hard it is to be treated with intolerance due to their opinions and beliefs [cited in 4, p. 318].

In M. Maussen & V. Bader's opinion, education is not merely one of the various spheres of society; it is also one of the major institutions of socialization in modern societies. In schools we are dealing with maturing children, not with adults. With regard to issues of identity, values, ideas, cultural and religious practices, convictions and choices, the fact that school-life is a period of "growth towards maturity" and "gradual increase in autonomy" is important, because this may lead to relevantly different situations and considerations compared to spheres in which we are dealing with adults. Schools are institutional environments in which challenges of diversity tend to become relatively acute and unavoidable because nearly all countries have compulsory education, which means that children will necessarily attend school and meet children with other (cultural, class, religious) backgrounds [5, p 23-24].

It is known that tolerance requires accepting individual differences, no matter how different they may be from our values. We must not look at those who have different views towards life as our enemies, but to support our own views with solid arguments, to accept that the opinions of others can be as valuable as ours [11].

Thus, cultural diversity is not a prejudice but a reality that must be seized at school. Cultural plurality does not seek only to defend cultural differences, but encourages cultural

dialogue, recognizing that everyone must contribute to the enrichment of human experience and that each of them is an effort to universalize a particular experience.

Multicultural education in modern society is not only a revelation of wealth and variety of issues in the classroom. Children may come from different cultural backgrounds, but also teachers, school and community. Briscoe (1991) suggested that students are inseparable from their culture and social environment and that their culture and background differences cannot just be shed outside the classroom door. Contreras and Lee (1990) suggested that, ―when the culture of the school or the teacher is not consistent with cultural values of students, there is the danger of cultural conflicts [cited in 1]. Tolerance towards lesser-known aspects and the pursuit of the complementary attitudes must become essential attitudes to underpin the new curriculum in the twenty-first century. The identification of common values can be a difficult task if it is not accompanied by the recognition of benefits arising from this diversity.

Developing teachers intercultural skills should be the focus of any educational institution because as Thorsten Knauth states, the field of education is crucial if future generations are to develop strategies for living together in a context of religious and cultural diversity, where attitudes of tolerance, respect, openness and readiness to learn from differences are honoured. In this context, it is imperative for teachers to develop cultural competence. As claimed by T. Bushnaq, developing cultural competence implies: developing cultural knowledge, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and emotional culture (with emphasis on developing empathy). Culturally competent teachers appreciate and respect the cultural differences recognizing that there is integrity in every culture one encounters [1, p. 107]. The absence of a real intercultural approach can be interpreted as uniformity that "all children are the same."

Tolerance can at the outset be delimited to "living peacefully with difference". This means that tolerance may include or overlap with other related concepts as respect, understanding, and intellectual freedom and so on [4, p. 11].

Tolerance templates promoted by the international scientific bodies under the challenges of intercultural diversity, diversity of opinions, beliefs etc., present new demands regarding the streamlining of teachers training conceived as an object of concern regarding professional development of educators on the dimension of pedagogical ethics for the formulation of the responses to issues concerning the problems of renovating training standards. As stated by Geir A., when teachers are asked to reflect on the values that are the most important in education, tolerance is one they often turn to [4, p.13]. In the author's opinion, tolerance is understood and practiced in the light of conceptions of *good* and *right*, and it is hard to get a grip of the particular understanding of tolerance. In an educational context tolerance must be understood in light of different established educational practices at different schools. The understanding of tolerance is conditioned by the practices teachers are a part of and their individual and inter-subjective conceptions of these [4, p. 21].

Education for tolerance is the ability to accept cultural diversity, linguistic, ethnographic, nutritional etc., in the social sense; however, it does not imply the acceptance of non-value, fanaticism, aggression [10]. Education for tolerance is increasingly concentrated in formal education; however it is also noticeable in the public domain where education for tolerance is part of a range of informal education initiatives. Amongst others there are, for example, religious, humanitarian, and other community based organisations and action groups addressing these issues as an integral part of their work. Both in formal and informal education, teaching for tolerance is associated with concepts such as citizenship education, peace education, human rights education, intercultural dialogue and interreligious learning [9, p. 1].

Education for cultural diversity ensures the integration in school, success, efficiency, and the school must relate to a climate favouring flexible, local community involvement and the

development of inclusion. Education brings to the fore tolerance by words such as peace, security, disarmament, rights and freedoms, etc. Psychosocial determined actions provide school improvement and concern and thus create a balance. Being tolerant means to be empathetic, communicative and relational concerned. Tolerance is a form of expressing the affective domain and comes under the reception mood in a certain situation. For the cognitive domain, it is a criterion of individual performance. The collective interactions such as the use of brainstorming or educational games eliminate the violence towards different cultures, ethnicity, religion, gender, social status [6, p 122 - p.125].

Cultural diversity depicts a basic phenomenon of society. It covers cultural differences between people, and between different groups, as multiple identities: traditions, customs, approach to education and society from an intercultural perspective [7]. As long as traditions and practices of intolerance and social exclusion are not counteracted, social cohesion in society is endangered [9, p. 1]

Those who accept cultural diversity demonstrate a higher level of cultural awareness and greater tolerance and openness to challenge within the meaning of the engine of progress. In this context, as maintained by T. Bushnaq, cultural awareness is a critical component of cultural competence as it is the individual ability to realize how a person's culture influences his/her behaviour, his/her basic assumptions, basic thoughts and how the most of his/her actions are controlled by his/her cultural background. Furthermore, cultural awareness is, according to many researches (Gingerich, 1998; Haberman, 1991; Villigas & Lucas, 2002), the heightened ability of individuals to understand and to internalize their own cultural values, beliefs and unique characteristics (i.e., worldview), while comprehending that others may not share the same values, beliefs and characteristics [1, p. 104]. Underpinning the cultural competence approach to multicultural education is a fundamental assumption that values of cultural pluralism should have a central place in the school curriculum [8, p. 29]
In ideal conditions, diversity promotes creativity, enhances decision making process as it raises the level of information, knowledge, perspectives and skills.

However, tolerance is not only a central value in education: It is a basic ideal in many spheres of society. Accusations of not being tolerant, of being intolerant are serious, and would in most instances damage the person's social and moral reputation. Tolerant persons, groups and states, are on the other hand, highly values [4, p. 13].
In conclusion, inter-cultural dimension of a quality educational process plays an important role in the modern society through its ability to creatively enrich the overall system of values, but also through the ability to effectively share these values with those around us. This phenomenon will have a logical and necessary consequence: the inevitable development of the relationships based on tolerance, understanding and flexibility among the citizens of today's world.

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