

## PROMOTING INTERCULTURALISM AT THE LEVEL OF MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS

**Adriana Denisa Manea, Assist. Prof., PhD, "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca**

*Abstract: In the context of globalization one of the most frequent phenomena that characterize the contemporary society is that of the workforce immigration. In most cases children accompany their parents, which requires school attendance in learning institutions where the teaching language is other than the native language. Contrary to appearances, this situation generates difficulties not only for the immigrant student but also for the teachers working in the specific institution. Confronted with the situation of teaching in heterogeneous classes, from a linguistic and cultural point of view, the teacher needs adequate support on behalf of the school board. The manner in which management is carried out in schools where the linguistic and cultural pluralism is a reality influences decisively the quality of the instructive-educative process.*

*Keywords: identity, intercultural education, management, intercultural curriculum, democratic-participative management.*

### **Introduction**

Interculturalism represents the contact among cultures and is materialized in the existence of an active and productive dialogue between them. We can observe that interculturalism has become a popular topic in the conditions in which the new millennium of global politics and inter-ethnic communication situates this concept as a reference dimension of the social rank experience, a predictor of diversity and an indicator of differences. Diversity represents a fundamental aspect of societies that regards, on the one hand, the differences between humans seen as individuals and, on the other hand, the differences between groups. The intercultural approach of education and society becomes therefore a necessity both at the social and educational level, considering the existence of multiple identities, of the plurality of values, traditions and customs, of the different ways of interacting between people or groups. From this perspective, we will consider interculturalism a new challenge meant to ensure social cohesion. The intercultural approach is not a new science, nor is it a subject, but a new methodology that seek integration into the interrogation of the educational space, psychology, anthropology, social sciences, political, cultural and historical data. (Cucoş, 2000)

Intercultural education suggests a pedagogical approach of the cultural differences both by considering cultural, socio-economic, religious or gender differences and by avoiding some potential risks due to unequal exchanges between cultures, to their polarization or the self-imposed patronage of a certain culture. Intercultural curriculum consists of themes that concern the acceptance and promotion of cultural diversities, learning co-living techniques and personal development together with others, avoiding and eliminating stereotypes and received wisdom. Through intercultural education at the level of learning institutions one can suggest solutions for the knowledge, acceptance and promotion of democratic values, of inter-, multi- and transculturalism, for the building and development of intercultural communication abilities, behavior practicing, pro-humanitarian, tolerant and altruistic attitudes. Intercultural education implies, due to its specific, genuine cognitive and moral valences. (Stan, 2001)

The educational reality indicates the fact that in the case of teaching in linguistically and culturally heterogeneous classes, the teacher needs adequate support on behalf of the school board. Hence, an important step in the direction of developing democratic behaviors, is

represented by the practice of democratic-participative management at school levels, which ensures a real integration of the group/class members in a joint activity, cooperation and permanent support both regarding professional and personal development. The benefits obtained through the practice of this type of management is due to the fact that the objectives to be reached are explained and negotiated, and the group is consulted in view of identifying the best strategies, whereas the internal motivation, cohesion and satisfaction of the school members as a result of consulting and participating in the decision-making process are increased. (Manea, 2013)

Social studies indicate Romania as a country with an ancient history regarding multiethnic and pluricultural cohabitation, with 20 acknowledged ethnic minorities, which led to the registration of major contributions in the economic and social development, objectified in conflict prevention, increase of social cohesion, of solidarity between people, political, economic and cultural interconnectedness at a regional and international level. (Poledna & colb, 2002)

### Major research coordinates

Our endeavor aimed at identifying the influences of practicing democratic-participative management within schools prevalent in bilingualism and of the multiethnic populations upon students' performance. Within the used methodology, the main method was the opinion poll, doubled by the focus-group method and interview technique. The target group, consisting of 20 school units in 4 counties: Bistrița-Năsăud, Mureș, Cluj and Sibiu, comprised a subject sample made of 100 teachers who develop their activity in the 20 secondary schools where democratic-participative management is practiced. The use of the focus-group method was facilitated by the activities of obtaining level 1 teacher certifications within school units in the target group.

### Presentation and analysis of results

The applied questionnaire consisted of 8 closed questions whose answers, due to the length limitations of the material, will be partially presented and analyzed.

One of the items of the poll, whose results are synthetically presented in Table 1 referred to the type of school practiced management, perceived by the staff of teachers and consciously and responsibly assumed by the school principal.

**Table 1:** Opinions regarding the type of practiced management

| Item                                 | N (%)      |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Authoritarian, autocratic management | 0 (0%)     |
| Laissez-faire management             | 2 (2%)     |
| Democratic-consultative management   | 22 (22%)   |
| Democratic-participative management  | 76 (76%)   |
| Total                                | 100 (100%) |

As shown in the data presented above, the majority of the respondents (76%) assert that the school unit where they belong to practices a democratic-participative type of management. By merging the two options of democratic management, that is democratic-consultative management and democratic-participative management (98%), we may claim that the selected learning institutions as a target group of our study are characterized by the practice of democratic management. To validate this conclusion, we also used the answers received within the semi structured interview applied to the 20 managers of the targeted institutions, in which, to answer the question “What is the type of management you practice in

your school unit? There were firm and unanimous replies in favor of democratic-participative management.

The following item completes the data indicated above, in the sense that it emphasizes the manner in which school management, where linguistic and cultural pluralism is a reality, influences the quality of the teaching-learning process.

**Table 2.** The influence of practicing democratic-participative management on school performance at the level of linguistically and culturally heterogeneous classes

| Item   | Extremely responsible | Very responsible | Little responsible | Very little responsible | Not at all | Total       |
|--|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------|-------------|
| How much do you consider the practice of democratic-participative management to be responsible for the school performance at the level of heterogeneous classes (plurilingual, multicultural)? | 36<br>36%             | 44<br>44%        | 9<br>9%            | 7<br>7%                 | 4<br>4%    | 100<br>100% |

The analysis of the data indicated in the table above allows us to assert that the 44% of those who claimed that the practice of democratic-participative management is very responsible for the occurrence of school performance within heterogeneous classes, where the linguistic and cultural differences are obvious, cumulated with the 36% of those believing that the this type of management is extremely responsible for such consequences, indicates the need to practice a type of management that focuses on active participation, implication and responsibility over the act of learning and decision-making.

The aim of the item “How much do cultural differences influence the group cohesion production?” was to find out whether the students’ group cohesion is determined by cultural differences among the members of such groups.

**Table 3:** The degree of influence in cultural differences over the group cohesion production

| Item  | Great influence | Big influence | Little influence | Very little influence | Not at all | Total       |
|---|-----------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------|-------------|
| How much do cultural differences influence the group cohesion production? | 63<br>63%       | 22<br>22%     | 12<br>12%        | 3<br>3%               | 0<br>0%    | 100<br>100% |

The answers reveal that numerous respondents, 63%, mentioned that cultural differences bear a great influence of the building of a group’s cohesion, whereas 22% believe that the cohesion of the group is dependent on the cultural disparities between humans, while 12% claim this dependence to be little and 3% consider it significantly reduced. Based on the indicated data, we can state there is a very relevant, respectively important dependence in the

group cohesion building having members with cultural differences, which entangles us, consider that such culturally heterogeneous classes require a type of education that enables the students' cohesion.

Another item of the questionnaire referred to the type of curriculum applied in classes where the level of understanding and comprehension of the information transferred to students is different, mainly due to linguistic differences between subjects.

**Table 4:** The share of applied curriculum

| Item                                  | N (%)      |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Class-customized curriculum           | 41 (41%)   |
| Adapted and individualized curriculum | 14 (14%)   |
| Intercultural curriculum              | 12 (12%)   |
| Unadapted curriculum                  | 33 (33 %)  |
| Total                                 | 100 (100%) |

According to the data shown in Table 4 regarding the importance of the curriculum type applied in plurilinguistic heterogeneous classes, the accentuated polarity at the extremities, namely 33% referring to national/unadapted curriculum and a customized version of the curriculum in 41% of the cases, respectively 12% for intercultural curriculum and 14% for adapted and individualized curriculum, reveals the increased level of the need to adapt the curriculum in order to satisfy the educational requirements of the students.

Considering the fact that the practices at the level of our country, as shown in the studies, have proven that cultural pluralism was benefic to economic growth and social progress, the purpose was to investigate whether the current educational reality confirms the record of the same or similar values.

**Table 5:** Influence of cultural and linguistic differences over socio-professional influences

| Item   | Very much | A lot     | Little    | Very little | Not at all | Total       |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Rank the contribution of the cultural and linguistic differences to the socio-professional performance acquisition | 26<br>26% | 34<br>34% | 14<br>14% | 23<br>23%   | 27<br>27%  | 100<br>100% |

The opinions of the respondents over the item analyzed in Table 5 show an accentuated spreading of the influence indicators that cultural and linguistic differences bear over socio-professional performances. Therefore, while 26% of the respondents consider the influence level is very high, 34% reveal a big influence of these differences of performance, 14% indicate that they estimate performance is little influenced by such disparities, 23% see a very little influence in the performance building process and 27% claim there is no influence whatsoever of the cultural and linguistic differences over the socio-professional performance. Such varied opinions can be explained as a reflection of the belief that professional and social performance depends on a variety of factors, both private (motivation, intelligence) and social and cultural. Moreover, as a result of the focus-group meetings held to discuss this topic, we concluded that under the conditions of an extended geo-economic space at European and global level, it is only natural to maximize the benefic influences of each culture in the personal and social pursuit, but also that our own performance depends of our determination.

### Conclusions

In accordance to the results obtained as a result of our investigations we can assert the following:

- interculturalism claims respect and appreciation for other cultures on behalf of each person, it means tolerance and openness towards distinct cultures, understanding and a need for knowledge in view of personal and social development.

- at the instructive-educative level, through the curriculum, one can support the promotion of universally valid principles such as: tolerance and compromise, respect and understanding, solidarity and honesty.

- the practice of democratic-participative management leads to good results at the level of linguistically and culturally heterogeneous classes, in the sense of comprehension and learning based on distinct intercultural experience, on practicing efficient communication with the subjects, on acquiring group cohesion through intercultural mediation, on emphasizing the benefit gained through the exchange of ideas, opinions and knowledge.

The support of interculturalism at the level of school units represents, in our point of view, an objective necessity, a profound act of reflection over the beneficial implications that a correct approach over cultural differences may produce.

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