

# Education in multicultural conditions

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**Abstract** At the time when the European society was not going only through a political crisis resulting from the migration of refugees from third countries but also the value and identification crisis, it is important to reflect these problems also in education. Mixed multicultural classes with students of different nationalities have become a common reality. Educators are facing new challenges in which a crucial question resonates: How to effectively organize the education of the youth while simultaneously ensuring the education is respecting the fundamental human values of the European culture? Partial responses were also provided by projects addressed by the Faculty of Education of Matej Bel University, which are presented by the authors of the paper.

**Key words** Multicultural education, anti-prejudice education, ethics, teacher training

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Although the cultural heterogeneity is a part of the cultural heritage, the coexistence of peoples of various cultures has not always been materialized with a level of understanding. We have witnessed adverse events in history based on intolerance and violation of human rights. Today, the increase of the discriminatory atmosphere and the various extremist groups but also the numerous unrests based on discriminatory motifs of certain social groups initiated by extremist groups are observed in almost every EU member state. It begins with the expressions of mistrust, hostility, fear of otherness which is based on prejudices against "other people" in most cases and these are also acquired under the negative examples set by youth.

Knowledge of the causes of otherness and acquisition of values based on respect for others are important for sympathy and mutual peaceful coexistence in multicultural society. The barrier-free verbal communication which enables better mutual knowledge of communicating but also mutual sympathy and subsequent acceptance of the other culture is important in the process. It is possible to develop all of these attributes from an early age by humanistically-oriented education focusing on respect for human rights in compliance with the aims of the education for prosociality.

## 2. VALUE PROBLEMS IN SLOVAK SOCIETY

The current problem of Slovak society is that in spite of the numerous legal instruments, directives, and various legislative recommendations, the public is insufficiently informed about human rights, also about rights which should be exercised in ordinary civil life when coexisting with individuals from different cultural environment. The Slovak society lags behind in terms of the quality of public opinion which is strongly influenced by ethnic, religious and gender stereotypes. Due to that fact the violation of human rights of individuals is considered only as an marginal issue in most cases. Respect for human is being lost, the moral values are based on the solidarity principle showing the decreasing trend and this is manifested in the relationship with foreigners and immigrants.

Slovakia is not a traditional target country for migrants, but on the contrary, until recently, the Slovak citizens have migrated abroad from various reasons. Today, however, Slovakia is also becoming the transitional and target country for various migrants. Refugees in the Slovak Republic account for 1.5 % of the population and the number is still increasing. For example in 2014, the number of refugees was 10.5 % higher than in 2013. In 2015, the number of refugees living in the Slovak Republic was 2535, 330 people claimed asylum and it was granted to 8 of them. People claiming asylum were mainly from Iraq, Afghanistan and Ukraine. (From the beginning of 2016, 10 claims has been recorded, 150 people have been granted asylum – since 31 March 2016.)<sup>1</sup> Slovakia accepted 58 Eritrean citizens in February 2016 who has come here within the framework of the so called humanitarian transfer (cooperation with UNHCR and IOM) and joined the group of 85 Somalia and Lebanon citizens placed in the migrant camp in Humenné from 2015. These immigrants will be continually leaving for the US (<http://www.minv.sk/?tlacove-spravy>). Slovakia has voluntarily accepted 149 Assyrian Christians (25 families together) in December 2015 as a reaction to the refusal to accept migrants under the quota system and as a voluntary help in solving the migrant crisis in Europe. Accommodation was provided by the Diocese of Nitra. The citizens' association *Pokoj a dobro* ensures the Slovak language classes for adults and its professional subjects provide the social and legal advice for families. Schoolable children are according to age put in classes among Slovak pupils. The problem

<sup>1</sup> According to Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic statistics (<http://www.minv.sk/?statistiky-20>)

of continuing the studies of Iraqi children in high schools has not been solved yet.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1 Various public opinion surveys focused on immigration

In this context, various public opinion surveys focused on immigration are increasingly being held. Interesting results have emerged from the Gallup company research which was conducted from 2012 – 2014 in 142 countries on the sample of 183,000 respondents. Respondents were answering the question if the immigration rate to a particular country should remain on the same level or if it should increase or decrease. 43 % of respondents were for maintenance of the current situation or increasing the immigration rate, 34 % supported the decrease of the immigration rate and 52 % of European citizens are for decreasing the immigration rate in their country. Attitudes to migrants differed depending on the particular European region: Swedish, Danish and Finnish citizens share positive attitudes to migration in general, respondents from Southern Europe countries such as Greece, Malta and Italy which are for migrants the entrance countries to Europe want to decrease the immigration rate. According to this survey 37 % of Slovak respondents are in favour of maintaining the current situation in immigration, 44 % are for decreasing it and only 4 % are for increasing of the immigration rate.<sup>3</sup>

From the local survey of the Department of Political Science of Alexander Dubček University in Trenčín which was conducted from 1 November 2015 to 31 January 2016 on the sample of 1033 respondents, results have emerged that 75.5 % of respondents fear the criminality rate in Slovakia may increase with the coming of asylum-seekers. Only 7.6 % of respondents think immigrants can make a contribution to Slovakia. The survey has researched also “the social distance”. It has emerged that Slovak citizens are not willing to live near migrants. The majority of respondents (70.6 %) would be concerned if the migrant camp was opened in their vicinity. 88.2 % of the respondents do not want the mosque being built in their town in the future.<sup>4</sup>

Specialists interpret such and similar results of surveys on the basis of homophobia supported by populist claims of politicians and sensation-seeking media.

The results of the parliamentary elections held in 2016 are a consequence of negative social and value phenomena. Politicians of extremist *Ludová strana Naše Slovensko* have achieved representation in parliament with 8.04 % of the overall votes (in Slovakia the limit quota is 5 %). The election results analysed by the FOCUS agency have shown that from the voters voting for this party 72.7 % achieved secondary education. As far as the occupation is concerned, 14.3 % of *Ludová strana Naše Slovensko* voters were students and as far as the age is concerned, 22.7 % of voters were first-time voters (age 18 – 21).

These data points to some doubts about the effective educational impact of the educational network in the area of human rights themes. The problems of multicultural coexistence of citizens on the basis of equality are reflected only peripherally in the content of taught subjects, the solidarity principle is not sufficiently emphasised what is noticeable mainly in the relationship towards national and ethnic minorities.

### 3. THE REFLECTION OF PROBLEMS OUTLINED IN EDUCATION

We suppose that raising public awareness along with education about human rights is the necessary condition for the future moderation of negative attitudes towards migrants and refugees, but also ethnics stereotypically considered as problematic (in Slovakia it have been mostly the Roma up to now). What is topical, is not only the educational and social work with socially subnormal marginalised groups, but also such work with refugees arriving and mainly the educational influence on their children. The integration of these groups into the socio-cultural environment of majority is the aim, but it also brings with it, certain problems. Children of the parents from marginalised groups are mainly in need of specific education, help and support of the teacher. Such needs can be fulfilled only by teachers well-trained for such situations, mainly in the applicability of education to prosociality and respect for human rights.

Human rights represent the core basis for the establishment of the rule of law and are significant for dignity and authenticity of human being but also for the coexistence of people in the multicultural environment. Therefore they should be the part of the personal competences of every citizen. This can be achieved only if the education on respect for human rights is part of the every day education in all forms, degrees and levels.

The UN and the European Council has reacted to this global demand and recommended their member states ensure strategic planning of the national curriculum on human rights education. The planning should be based on the UN fundamental document, *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training*, formulated in the UN General Assembly Resolution 66/137. The declaration states that human rights education is a lifelong process that concerns education at all levels including preschool, primary, secondary and higher education, includes educational, training, information and awareness activities and is implemented by all forms of training and education including public, private, formal, informal or non-formal.

#### According to the Declaration, human rights education and training includes:

- a) education on human rights – providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection;
- b) education through human rights – learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners;
- c) education for human rights – empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others.<sup>5</sup>

Today Slovakia follows the *National Strategy for Human Rights Protection and Promotion in Slovakia* which was approved by the Slovak Government on 18 February 2015 and builds on the National Plan for Human Rights Education for years 2005 – 2014. The strategy in the “education” section states that “the main priority is to draw up life-long and nationwide plan for education and professional training in human rights and democratic citizenship including intercultural education.” The human rights education and training should be systematically included into all the national education programmes and create a preparatory system for human rights specialists in higher and postgradual education, mainly for teachers and school officials. The aim is to interconnect the education across the particular subjects in the field of human rights and to create the propagation and awareness methods in this field within the scope of responsible governmental units and public institutions. (See the Strategy<sup>6</sup> for details.)

<sup>2</sup> Available on: <http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/329094/nitra-deti-irackych-krestanov-zacali-navstevovat-skoly-zatial-len-zakladne/>

<sup>3</sup> IOM: [http://publications.iom.int/system/files/how\\_the\\_world\\_gallup](http://publications.iom.int/system/files/how_the_world_gallup)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/UNdec-HRE2012.html>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.mzv.sk/documents/10182/184563/06\\_strategia\\_vzdelavanie.pdf](https://www.mzv.sk/documents/10182/184563/06_strategia_vzdelavanie.pdf)

#### 4. PROSOCIAL EDUCATION – THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION IN MULTICULTURAL CONDITIONS

In prosocial education (education to prosociality) all educational and training attributes which enable to achieve the change in attitude of students on the basis of the improvement of the cognitive, affective and psychomotoric features of personality traits are included. By the change of attitudes one is enabled to create new perspective on values, change of life philosophy, acquire new attitudes and habits also in the relationship with the members of other cultures.

The education to prosociality is about the shaping of prosocial behaviour which is developed at these levels:

- Altruistic – defined as a voluntary help, primarily motivated by the interest in welfare and needs of others and is usually induced by empathy and internalized norms in accordance with helping others. It is helping in situations with little or no potential for direct explicit reward.
- Requested – defined as helping others, which is the answer to their verbal or non-verbal request. Such behaviour is mainly in the form of spontaneous help and is more common in case of children than in case of adolescents.
- Emotional – represents the orientation to helping others in situations evoking emotions. Such situations can be characterised as strongly emotionally charged.
- Public – public prosocial behaviour is the behaviour focused on the benefit of others realized in the presence of other people; it is at least partially motivated by the desire to obtain the permission, praise and respect from others and so to increase the own self-worth.
- Anonymous helping – helping others in such way that it is not known who is helping, as the case may be helping when helper does not know whom is helping.
- Prosocial behaviour in crisis – helping others in urgent and emergency situations. (Division by Carlo, Randall, 2002)

Within the framework of prosocial education the higher priority in schools should be given to the questions of human rights and multiculturalism. This demand is still topical in the Slovak cultural environment where the members of different ethnic, national, religious and cultural origin were living for centuries. Today, the traditional cultural diversity in Slovakia is deepening mainly under the globalisation and migration influence whom youth is facing. Pupils of all age groups will have to react adequately more often in private and public life in contact with the members of other cultures. They should be prepared for such challenges in order to be able to distinguish, respect and support the cultural diversity of their environment. That is the reason for putting the multicultural education on the content of education as a cross-cutting theme. Greater awareness of students of the immigration phenomena is in relation to that. It is emphasized in the International Organisation for Migration document named “*Challenges and Recommendations for Policy Makers*” (2008): “With regard to the expected quantitative raise of the number of migrants coming to Slovak Republic in the following decades and the need for integration of constantly increasing number of them we propose to deepen the awareness of Slovak pupils and students at all levels of schools about the migration phenomenon, especially about the core of integration of foreign citizens to the society and about their human rights and also to form suitable environment for immigrants in schools and to support the struggle against intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion of foreigners.” (Bargerová, Divinský, 2008).

#### 5. PARTIAL SOLUTIONS ARISING FROM ACQUIRED EMPIRICAL DATA

In relation to the problems indicated in education, the data from *The Analysis of Human Rights Education and Training in Regional Educational System* (Ondrášová, 2015) are significant. This analysis has monitored the state in the last 10 years and has been a source material for the new draft of the human rights education and training plan. Teachers from the Department of Ethics and Civil Education, the Faculty of Education of University of Matej Bel in Banská Bystrica have been inspired by some of the conclusions resulting from the analysis and have started to tackle two applied projects which should at least partially contribute to the remedy of deficiencies found. Both projects emphasize the problem of shortage and quality of literature and didactic material suitable for the presentation of human rights themes. One of the results of the analysis is that also the dissatisfaction of both teachers and students has increased. Only half of the teachers believe the school has a satisfactory amount of suitable literature and one fifth have objections to its quality. Respondents claimed that Internet is the major source of gaining materials for human rights teaching in primary (96.3 %) and high (92.3 %) schools. In the period covered (2007 – 2012), the use of various other materials than literature has increased. Such materials are mainly image (the number has increased by one half in 5 years) and videocassettes, also DVD, CD-ROMs. (Ondrášová, 2015)

That is the reason for the aim of **Human Rights and Anti-prejudice Education** Project – to specify subjects and themes suitable for the implementation of anti-prejudice education and to create the special multimedia materials which will be examined in practice and subsequently creatively used by teachers during lessons. This aim is based on the empirical finding of the current state of human rights education in primary and high schools. In April 2015, at the beginning of dealing with the issue we realized the diagnostic survey of state of human rights teaching in primary and high schools. The sample of 219 teachers from primary and high schools was chosen by random cumulative selection in which all the regions of Slovakia were represented (more comprehensive information available in Poláková, Baďurová, 2015). Greater interest in prosocial education as 86.2 % of respondents was conditioned by greater and more quality repertory of suitable didactic material. 15 % of respondents claimed they would focus more on the human rights if they had suitable methodical materials at their disposal and 42 % of respondents linked the success of their work with that they would like to have suitable materials/teaching aids for students. When surveying the teaching aids used by teachers during lessons, the greatest number of answers was recorded in using and searching online documents and materials and in aids made by teachers themselves. On the other hand, they welcome the most systematically structured information and materials available on the Internet, incentive videos presenting the particular themes on human rights and CD-ROM with the complex workbooks and tasks for students. These findings correspond with the data from “*Analysis*” and also with our projects intention to create and provide suitable didactic materials for teachers. Teachers themselves would actively participate in creation of these materials. Such didactic aids should be interesting, saturated in terms of content and last but not least supporting the participation of students on solving human rights-related problems.

In the second project called “**Didactic aids facilitating the implementation of chosen cross-cutting themes into the Ethics teaching in the second stage of primary schools**” our aim has been narrowed to Ethics. This project is also solving problems of shortage of didactic aids enabling effective implementation of cross-cutting themes into the Ethics teaching in classes with older school-

aged children. Its aim is to create didactic aids helping to effectively implement chosen cross-cutting themes (media education, personal and social development, multicultural education) into the content of Ethics based on empirical research of current state, reference books analysis and the needs of practice.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In our opinion, more quality implementation of human rights and multicultural themes into the teaching in primary and high schools can be achieved by means of greater emphasis on prosocial education, not only on gaining knowledge about these issues (more in Poláková, Čižmáriková, 2013). Teachers should be enabled to develop their knowledge and didactic qualification in human rights constantly and mainly by exchanging experience in online public discussions in specifically oriented portals. In these portals the sufficient amount of didactic material would be found. They would gain unlimited access to the database of materials usable when preparing the teaching of stated themes and they do not have to waste the time on exacting the creation of their own aids. We assume the aims focused on the education and training formulated in National Strategy for Human Rights Protection and Promotion can be achieved only with active teachers with professional and didactic competences in human rights and teachers dedicated to these issues. It is possible to stimulate teachers in gaining these competences needed by mutual interaction, experience exchanging and community engagement. We want to contribute to this with the launching of the debate about the outlined problems.

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