INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND ITS REFLECTION IN THE GEOGRAPHICAL ACTIVITIES

Gica PEHOIU
“Valahia” University of Târgoviște, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Geography, str. Lt. Stancu Ion, no. 35, Târgoviște, Romania, Email: gpehoiu@yahoo.com

Abstract

During the present stage of mankind’s economical, social and cultural situation, where one can see multiple unprecedented mutations in the already quite unstable balance among the particular perceptions of each person or of each culture, one can feel the imperative need for a trend to alleviate these disproportions. In this contemporary state of affairs, among others, Geography – by its diversity and complexity – can contribute to the approach of harmonization of the multiculturality, as a factor that educates for tolerance, mutual understanding and acceptance of the global intercultural differences.

Keywords: intercultural education, multiculturality, cultural dimension, intercultural competences, Geography

1. INTRODUCTION

In the literature, the intercultural approach takes on two dimensions. One of them refers to the dynamics of the relations established through communication, through the moves of the population from one place to the next, from one country to the next or from one continent to the next, a phenomenon known under the name of migration, while the second dimension highlights the interrelations created between the respective human communities, which undergo changes in time.

The cultural dimension relies on a series of elements, out of which we can mention: recognizing the values, the diversity of the representations, the relations, and the dialogue based on respect and reciprocity among the World’s peoples. Cucuş (2000) sees culture as “a binder, a common factor fostering consensus and understanding among people worldwide”.

It also constitutes an important topic, a worldwide topic, we could say, as cultural diversity has been unanimously acknowledged as a reality and a fundamental aspect of the present society, having in view, in this case, the differences present among the population as a community of individuals, on the one hand, and various ethnic groups, on the other hand.

The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) highlights cultural diversity as representing “multiple cultural and societal expressions”. Even though on the level of UNESCO, cultural diversity has been approached in several ways in time, nevertheless, today, two perspectives are considered as the ones via which cultural diversity may be viewed. They are convergent and are not mutually exclusive.

Regarding the first perspective, one can appreciate the fact that the cultural diversity specific of a society should reflect: man’s fundamental rights, the promotion of cultural democracy, equal participation of all minorities (ethnic, gender, linguistic, racial, religious, sexual etc.), being analyzed under the concept of multiculturalism. The second approach concerns the cultural diversity of different states/societies and/or cultures; according to this perspective, cultural diversity
is viewed as a principle that needs to be respected in the exchanges of cultural goods and services among the above-mentioned entities and cultures.

The existence of multiple identities, of values, traditions and customs and of the different ways of relating among different individuals or groups requires an intercultural approach of education and society. This represents a challenge and a condition for social cohesion, which relies on the cultivation of mutual respect and understanding both among individuals and among the various human groups.

2. HYPOTHESIS AND METHODOLOGY

Working hypothesis and methodology of this study is the development of intercultural education among students in secondary education, especially in geographical activities, for approaching cultural diversity, based on strategies that have in view spiritual interactions, the elimination of the barriers of interpersonal separation among the different ethnic groups, the cultivation and promotion of democratic values and faiths, of the respect for people’s own cultural identity, but also of the respect for the liberty and life of others.

In order to achieve the purpose of research, bibliographic study method was used on documents like present curriculum in Romania, emphasizing the side of interculturality, imposing as a need the responsibility towards the demands of the educational process through the development among the pupils of the interest for the multiple aspects of the concept of diversity viewed from a social perspective and supposing a respect of the cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, social status or education variety.

During the present period, the problem of intercultural education is closely connected to a series of factors such as: migration, economic or other economic-political elements, these desiderata lying at the basis of its inclusion in the debates of the EU and on its member states’ agenda. In this sense, the concrete problems school is faced with today deal with the integration of children belonging to different ethnic communities, generated, on the one hand, by the population’s reticence to change and, on the other hand, by the lack of pragmatic approaches of inclusion of this category of children.

At the same time, school is becoming, increasingly more, the most important place awaiting and validating the effects of cultural diversity in the relations among pupils, teachers and minority pupils, and respectively the affiliation to a certain ethnic community. The conclusion resulting from this statement is the understanding of the need to respect cultural diversity, the promotion and the openness towards a tolerant society.

As far as today’s educational policies of Romania are concerned - also as a member state of the European Union - they promote the implementation of those strategies and policies relying on social inclusion, on the adaptation of the educational system to the ethno-cultural peculiarities of the children belonging to the various ethnic communities or ethnic groups.

In the literature, an *ethnic community* is defined as representing “cultural, ethnic, religious groups present in a common area and in interaction, respecting the traditions and customs transmitted from generation to generation” (Ciolan, 2008, p. 73).

The same author shows that the analysis of the intercultural dimension of the social life educationally represents an instrument “bringing education close to the daily life, to the significant problems of the real life”, and at the same time intercultural education participates to the “collective creation of a space that accepts, inserts and re-elaborates the cultural significances of the members of the various communities in contact” (Ciolan, 2008, p. 74).

3. INTERCULTURAL SKILLS AND ACTIVITIES - GENERAL ASPECTS

Intercultural skills refer to a set of knowledge, abilities, potentials and behaviors which, profitably used, allow the individual to solve certain intercultural interaction situations. They are
substantiated in the finding of efficient solutions to the problems appeared in the present intercultural contexts. The components pursued by them are the cognitive, the affective and the behavioral one, according to the following considerations:

- the cognitive component supposes the existence of an adequate cultural and intercultural conscience and refers to the acknowledgement of the fact that people interpret one and the same behavior in different ways;
- the affective component comprises a set of attitudes of appreciation and recognition, openness, positive reception, respect, curiosity of a person regarding the other;
- the behavioral component and the component of communication supposes capacities such as: flexibility, empathy, tolerance, autonomy in thinking, social and civic responsibility, social cohesion, freedom.

The pupils’ intercultural skills are shaped during the activities taking place in the formal, non-formal and informal educational environment. Out of these activities, we shall mention:

- instructive-educative activities taking place in school, meant to shape the pupils’ cooperation capacity for solving certain tasks, to know the pupils’ behavior concerning faiths, norms, principles, values, divergences of opinions, for adapting and getting integrated in various teams or cultural environments etc.;
- activities taking place outside the classroom (extracurricular activities), offering the pupils multiple opportunities of participating to various intercultural events and actions, namely leisure time activities (trips, visits, hikes, camps, exhibitions, shows, other types of events), by means of which it is attempted to organize or crystallize relations, explore and investigate certain realities, cultural or historical acts etc.;
- activities undertaken in the informal educational environment, for instance on the level of the family, locality, community, group of friends, media etc., meant to assure the relation / socialization with other pupils / persons coming from various cultural environments and with their families, the involvement in cultural or religious actions, undertaken in the community they are part of or organized by various associations, foundations but also listening to / watching certain broadcasts, reading books, reviews etc.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Intercultural skills in the geography curriculum

The present curriculum for teaching-learning-evaluating Geography in primary and secondary education, from the perspective of the multicultural dimension, proposes skills, attitudes and behaviors meant to assure respect for cultural differences and national identities, and actively support fundamental values such as: understanding the natural, human and cultural diversity of Romania, of Europe and of the World, training the pupils in the spirit of developing and promoting a tolerant life in a multicultural society.

In the obligatory curriculum, Geography is included as a discipline starting from the primary school (4th grade). From the perspective of multicultural education, in the Geography syllabus for the 4th grade, one of the four framework-objectives proposed is the manifestation of a behavior favorable to the improvement of the relations between man and the environment, and as reference objectives there appear: expressing an interest for knowing the environment, identifying different ways of preserving and protecting it, collaborating with one’s fellows in the spirit of the initiative for protecting the environment of life (Geography syllabuses in force, from the 4th to the 12th grade).

During the secondary education and in high school the approach initiated during primary school is continued and developed and Geography – one of the eight key-skill domains elaborated by the work group of the European Commission – promotes as well skills of the type of the fifth domain – Social skills and civic skills (comprising all the behaviors allowing the pupil to participate efficiently and constructively to the social life, to alleviate conflicts where they occur, the essence consisting in an efficient social interaction, both in the small groups and the extended communities,
and also both in the personal life and in the life taking place in society) and from the eighth domain – *Cultural sensitivity and expression* (shaping the capacity to evaluate and appreciate the importance of the creative ways of expressing ideas, experiences and emotions in various cultural environments - music, theatre and dance, literature, fine arts etc.) - Pehoiu (2012).

Next, we present, in Tables 1 and 2, the knowledge, abilities and attitudes proposed for the two domains mentioned above.

### Table 1. Knowledge, abilities and attitudes regarding the social skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Elements of substantiation by means of competences specific of school geography</th>
<th>Other competences resulting from the specifics of education by geography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>general elements of social and cultural geography; knowing the human diversity of the contemporary world; knowing the regional groups of the contemporary world; the environment as a support of the activity of the human society and as a premise of its social, cultural, economic development; the socio-economic and cultural specifics of Europe in the contemporary World.</td>
<td>elements of social and cultural geography developed to a further level; rational arrangement of the environment and sustainable development as a premise of the construction of an adequate cultural and social environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abilities</strong></td>
<td>understanding the specifics of the social and cultural geography elements in the diversity context of the contemporary World.</td>
<td>Arranging the cultural and social area in harmony with the specifics of the geographic environment and with the elements resulting from the sustainable development principles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudes</strong></td>
<td>respect for human diversity; interest in knowing different countries, cultures and peoples; respect for the environment as environment of life for the human society; interest in sustainable development.</td>
<td>openness to the present problems of the contemporary world, which concern its social, cultural and development dimension.</td>
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### Civic skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Other competences resulting from the specifics of education by geography</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>general elements of geography regarding the contemporary countries, continents and World; knowing the regional differences of the contemporary world; the environment as a domain of civic responsibility; the relation between the local, regional, national, European and world dimensions of the basic environmental and contemporary world problems; knowing the essential elements of the geography of Europe, of the European Union and of its member states.</td>
<td>geographic elements of sustainable development and territorial organization, equidistant and equipotential knowledge of the European Countries, of the European Union and the integration of Romania in its structures.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Abilities</strong></td>
<td>identifying the civic dimension of the elements of social, local, national, European and international organization; critical reception of the media</td>
<td>arranging the inhabited area in harmony with the sustainable development principles; realizing an objective diagnosis of the features of a territory in order to optimize its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain</td>
<td>Elements of substantiation by means of competences specific of school geography</td>
<td>Other competences resulting from the specifics of education by geography</td>
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<td></td>
<td>information concerning the local and national community and the problems of the contemporary World.</td>
<td>functioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudes</strong></td>
<td>respect for the human diversity of the contemporary World on the level of the local communities of Europe and of the World; education in the spirit of support for the national and European values.</td>
<td>openness to the present problems of Europe and of the World, which concern its social, cultural and development dimensions; assuming a role in making a decision on the level of the community; shaping a responsible civic attitude regarding the elements of environmental degradation of the local community.</td>
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Table 2. Knowledge, abilities and attitudes concerning the competence: cultural sensitivity and expression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>geographic places with a cultural significance (towns, cultural centers, university centers, religious centers, tourist sites etc.).</th>
<th>explaining certain elements related to cultural diversity by means of the geographic, social and economic context in which they are developing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abilities</strong></td>
<td>relating media information to elements of spatial location.</td>
<td>esthetic perception of the landscape, reflecting the surrounding reality; perceiving the reflection of the geographic dimension in certain artistic works (painting, music, architecture, literature, film).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudes</strong></td>
<td>positive attitude towards culture and civilization.</td>
<td>cultivating respect for the cultural and artistic domains; transfer in the real landscape of certain elements of the esthetic dimension of certain artistic works.</td>
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Out of the learning units and topics in relation to these skills we can mention (Geography syllabuses in force, from the 4th to the 12th grade):
- in the 5th, 8th, 10th and 12th grade, within the learning unit *The geography of the population and of the human settlements*, interculturality aspects are approached through the use and correlation of specific notions such as: races, ethnic groups, linguistic structures, traditions, customs, myths, conflicts etc.;
- in the 6th and the 7th grades, when the *Geography of the continents* is studied, intercultural education is realized permanently through the presentation of the sociocultural aspects specific of every region and country under analysis, in learning units such as “Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Australia, Oceania – general characterization” or “Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Australia, Oceania – regions and countries”, during the lessons, analogies being made to the features of our country. At the same time, by explaining the natural, human and cultural diversity of the continents, correlations to the information acquired during other school disciplines are realized;
- during the 9th and 10th grade, when *Physical geography. Earth, people’s planet* is studied, the learning unit “Environment, landscape and human society” is meant to develop the interest in the scientific research of the community, and, in the 10th grade, the discipline *Human geography* aims to shape a positive attitude of the pupils towards education, knowledge, society, culture, civilization, and the cultural dimension;
- during the 11th and the 12th grades, when respectively the disciplines *Geography – Fundamental problems of the contemporary world, and Europe - Romania - the European Union. Fundamentals* are studied, due to the presence of certain learning units regarding human, ethnic, linguistic diversity etc., new educational dimensions are highlighted, such as the openness towards the universal, towards culture and towards the civic side of the present World. Out of their contents, we can exemplify: “Regionalization and globalization of the contemporary World”, “Population, natural resources and the development of the contemporary World”, “Elements of social and cultural geography”, “Elements of European and Romanian geography”, “Europe and the European Union in the contemporary World” etc.

Regarding the Curriculum based on the school’s decision (Mândruţ, 2010), the cultural dimension can be realized by offering optional courses having in view the various topics that can lead to cultural sensitivity among the pupils, through the realization of certain general competences such as: perceiving the defining elements of the cultural local, national, European and world patrimony; identifying the cultural specifics and the artistic phenomena as a reality of the contemporary society; understanding the relations between cultural and human diversity; perceiving the esthetic dimension of the daily life; debating the various topics of the cultural dimension and comparing the different viewpoints; using the terminology about culture and civilization, all these in different communicational contexts.

Examples of optional courses that could be realized along the cultural dimension can be: “From the local horizon to the European Union”, “Introduction to the contemporary civilization and culture”, “The culture and civilization of the Romanian area”, “Culture and civilization in the European area”, “World culture and civilization”, “World capitals”, “We, our families and the community we are living in”, “People of our village/town/quarter” etc.

By realizing these courses one can identify elements of own knowledge and identity, faiths and values of the pupils’ families, elements of knowledge regarding the demographic and cultural structure of the community where the school is situated; one can make analyses highlighting the similarities and differences between people or identify mechanisms for fighting against the application of the old to the detriment of the new, or for fighting against prejudice and discrimination.

The optional courses are realized on the level of a discipline, curricular area or on the level of several curricular areas and can be taught by a single teacher or by a team of teaching specialists.

Regarding the *extracurricular activities* in the domain of Geography, the competences concerning the cultural dimension include activities such as: practical applications, thematic trips with participation to different cultural events and local feasts, exhibitions, contents, celebrations, musical activities etc., all of them representing main ways of knowing, discovering and appreciating specific features of various peoples and cultures around the world.

5. CONCLUSIONS

One can appreciate that multiculturality, intercultural education, ethnic and cultural diversity trigger nowadays complex problems. School in general and especially teachers have the most important role in their alleviation, especially given the present challenges concerning the definition of one’s cultural identity, the acceptance of the identity related to the professional role, which is connected to the teaching of school disciplines to pupils belonging to various ethnic groups.
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