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EDUCATION FOR MULTICULTURAL PURPOSES (IN THE LIGHT OF ROMA INTEGRATION IN BULGARIA)

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Abstract: The paper provides a review of some of the existing conceptual frameworks for multicultural teacher educations and outlines their key elements. With regard to the pertinent need to provide coherent and consistent training to Bulgarian school teachers working with Roma children and driven by the purposes of a project entitled "Integrated approach of Ruse Municipality for integration of Roma and other vulnerable groups on the territory of Ruse district" under the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme, the authors outline the structural elements, content and general principles of organization of such a framework suited to the Bulgarian educational context.

Keywords: Multicultural Groups, Roma Integration, Multicultural Education.

INTRODUCTION

The Roma population living in the European Union constitutes the largest ethnic minority group on the continent that comprises 10 to 12 million. Despite the fact that those people inhabit all Member States, candidate countries and potential candidate countries, they live in extremely poor economic conditions and they are usually magrinalised, segregated and discriminated. Data from "The Roma People in Europe" Report (2014) suggest that the common perception of the members of this ethnic group in most of the European countries is that they are criminals, people who are reluctant to work and unwilling to integrate into the society. This attitude is not surprising considering the lack of understanding towards the Romani across Europe during the past centuries. Starting from the 15th century when the fist anti-Roma laws were passed in Switzerland and Germany, there have been numerous accounts of maltreatment of Roma in the recent history – vigilante violence, seizure of property, forced sterilisation of Roma women, racist movements and the use of language of hatred in political speeches and media publications related to the Roma population. The presence of stereotyped perceptions of the Romani and of anti-Gypsysm has led to the deprivation of those people from high quality education, which has affected their successful integration on the labour market and which has marked their existence on low-level incomes and poor health conditions.

Today the integration of Roma is part of the European agenda considering the recent developments and policy documents on this issue. The joint responsibility of all EU countries on the inclusion of Roma is expressed in the respective *National Strategies for Roma Integration* developed by each country in 2011 that comprise four key domains: education, employment, healthcare and housing. These national strategies are at the core of the *National Roma integration strategies: a first step in the implementation of the EU Framework* produced by the European Commission in 2012 and to the subsequent

Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures designed in 2013. All these official frameworks and strategic planning documents outline the specific measures that need to be taken to improve the living conditions of Roma people, to foster their access to housing and employment, to encourage their participation and the successful completion of secondary school and university education.

Central to the study of the integration of Roma through education is the issue of multiculturalism and its implications in the development of a learner-centred perspective in the pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes and courses across Europe. Despite the rich number of works devoted to the topic of multicultural teacher education (e.g. Todor, I., 2015; Bulku, A., 2016; Vranješević, J., 2014; Cochran-Smith, M. & Zeichner, K. M., 2005 among others), very few of them tackle the problem of how multicultural education theory and practice is incorporated into the teacher training programmes and professional development courses available in Bulgaria. This is not surprising since there is no teacher competence framework available at national level that specifies the knowledge and skills that Bulgarian teachers need for possess in order to effectively and efficiently implement the necessary instructional practices for teaching in a multicultural setting. What is more, the transmission of knowledge and skills from teacher trainers to those teachers who work with Roma children is based on the professional expertise of the trainers and on the multitude of interpretations of what multicultural teacher education is. Contrary to the general expectations, it is not a result of shared knowledge and common standards of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do to approach diversity in their classrooms.

This article, therefore, is a response to the call for more consistent research on the development of a more coherent vision on the conceptual elements of a framework for the multicultural education of practising Bulgarian teachers of Roma pupils. Its main purpose is to provide an analysis of the interlocking elements of existing conceptual frameworks for multicultural teacher education and to link these elements to the popular present day approaches for the development of 21st century teachers. Thus, it will outline the structure, content and general principles of organisation of a teacher training course for Bulgarian school teachers of Roma children developed under a project entitled "Integrated approach of Ruse Municipality for integration of Roma and other vulnerable groups on the territory of Ruse district" under the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a number of different conceptual frameworks for teacher education which attempt to provide an understanding of the possible approaches of conceiving teacher preparation. Two dominant views provide the general variations in teacher training programmes – the structural and the conceptual orientations (Feiman-Nemser, S. 1990). The structural alternatives focus on the duration, sequence and content of the pedagogical preparation, the conceptual alternatives place and emphasis on the "goals of teacher preparation and the means for achieving them" [Feiman-Nemser, S., 1990: 220]. These orientations in a teacher training programme put forward different views of the teacher and give direction to teacher preparation tasks such as:

- acquisition of strong subject matter knowledge and knowledge of the process of learning (the *academic orientation*);
- development of practical skills for working with a diverse group of learners (the *practical orientation*);
- attainment of skills and competences for instructional design (the *technological orientation*);
- commitment to professional development (the *personal orientation*);
- promotion of learners' democratic values and civic competence attributes and participation in decision-making (the *critical/social orientation*).

The proposed directions clearly indicate that in order to deal with academically and socially diverse populations of learners, 21st century teachers need to possess in-depth pedagogical knowledge of the teaching content, knowledge of different teaching strategies for working in multicultural and inclusive classrooms and an ability to implement these strategies in the teaching and learning process. Teachers' competences in this case correspond to the six broad roles of teachers as suggested by Paqay and Wagner (Paquay, L. & Wagner, M.-C., 2001) – *reflective agents, knowledgeable experts, skilful experts, classroom actors, social agents* and *lifelong learners*.

Another possible way of approaching the design of teacher training frameworks, which coincides partly with the framework orientations discussed above, is the idea of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (Cochran-Smith, M. and Lytle, S., 1999). They suggest that the teacher has to possess the following three types of knowledge: *knowledge for practice, knowledge in practice* and *knowledge of practice.* The first dimension – 'knowledge for practice' refers to the role of the teacher as a researcher and as a specialist in the subject matter he/she teaches. In order to acquire this type of knowledge teacher have to attend in-service teacher training courses or gear independently new learning by exploring theoretical models and approaches. The second conception aligns with the idea that teachers are reflective practitioners capable of reviewing their own teaching practices and offering solutions to identified drawbacks. The third conception, 'knowledge of practice', highlights the importance of the collective construction of knowledge in the teaching profession, which means that teachers not only inquire about the teaching and learning processes and strategies, about learners, about the curriculum and the school, but that they also exchange this knowledge and build communities of practice.

If we examine the framework of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) in the light of the recent developments concerning teachers' competences for working in multicultural settings, we can easily identify its links to the pertinent pedagogical paradigms, which emphasise the participation of teachers in professional learning communities. Teachers' involvement in collaborative activities allows them to develop their theoretical knowledge and practical skills about various aspects of the teaching profession, to act as researchers, as innovators, as contributors to their own and colleagues' learning. In fact, research shows that the positive change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs about working with students from diverse backgrounds and interacting with the families of these learners, is a result of the effectiveness of the active collaboration of teachers in professional learning communities (General Teaching Council for England, 2005; Hagger, H. & McIntyre, G., 2006).

The conceptual orientations of teacher education cover also the discussions related to the inclusion of the multicultural dimension in the teacher training programmes and courses. These typologies reflect the four approaches of Banks (Banks, J. A., 1993) on fostering multicultural curricular reforms through consistent instruction of teachers on aspects that refer to the integration of culture related content, the application of the principles of equity pedagogy or to the development of students' critical cultural awareness for managing stereotypes, prejudice and ethnocentrism. In addition, there are conceptions which support the claim that multicultural teacher training frameworks have to engage teachers in self-reflection aimed at the critical evaluation and rethinking of their own beliefs, stereotypes, attitude or assumptions of different cultural groups (DiAngelo, R. & Sensoy, Ö., 2010). The current discourse on the skills and competences of teachers documents the need to develop their sociocultural and intercultural teaching competence (Zeichner, K. and Hoeft, K., 1996). Furthermore, the relevance of the 'culturally responsive teaching' paradigm directs teacher training frameworks to the increase of teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions to dealing with diversity in the classroom (Varus, M. 2002).

Adhering to the perspective of promoting the "use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for [students]" [Gay, G., 2000: 29], teacher training frameworks need to stress the importance of preparing teachers to be reflective practitioners. This means that teachers have to be able to decentre from their own values, beliefs and behaviours and acknowledge that they are not the "only possible and naturally correct ones" [Byram, M., Nichols, A. & Stevens, D., 2001: 5]. Thus, they will be capable of creating classrooms of learners who feel comfortable with their own cultural identities, who respect human dignity and who are aware that tolerance to otherness and non-discrimination are essential principles for successful communication and co-existence in present day heterogeneous societies.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR MULTICULTURAL TEACHER TRAINING OF BULGARIAN SCHOOL TEACHERS OF ROMA LEARNERS

The conceptual frameworks reviewed in the previous section of the paper are by no means exhaustive. However, the major implications that have emerged from them give us grounds to claim that multicultural teacher training frameworks need to be a combination of *general didactic principles* and the

specific repertoire of intercultural learning, which lead to the development of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours for appropriate response to diverse learners.

The **general didactic principles** that constitute the first element of the teacher-training framework comply with the current constructivist paradigm, which acknowledges the role of teachers as learners and knowers. With regard to this teachers are expected to be self-regulated, life-long learners who are able to design and customize their learning paths, to self-evaluate themselves, to reflect critically on their own teaching and on the learning of students and to give and received constructive feedback. Hence, teachers are expected to acquire learning and innovation skills such as:

- *critical thinking* – solve different problems in the classroom in conventional and unconventional ways; reflect critically on his/her own teaching; analyze and synthesize information from a variety of sources and use it for self-directed learning and research purposes;
- *collaboration* – work effectively in diverse team within and outside the school;
- *communication* – communicate successfully in multilingual and multicultural environments;
- *creativity* – open and responsive to new ideas; creates innovative solutions to identified problems; uses different techniques for creating new ideas.

Along with that, teachers need to approach effectively the diversity in their classrooms, which requires from teacher trainers and teacher training framework designers to incorporate the dimension of intercultural competence into the pedagogical content and technologies used in teacher education. Taking into consideration the **intercultural communicative competence** model of Byram (Buram, M., 1997), we can highlight the following **principles** that need to be incorporated into the frameworks:

(1) **Development of declarative and procedural knowledge** – the content and teaching materials have to develop both the declarative and procedural knowledge of the teachers since they should possess knowledge of the social groups within their society and of their cultural practices, as well to enrich the knowledge of their own culture in the process of getting acquainted with the other cultures.

(2) **Critical comparison of one's own and the target culture** – this principle contributes to changing the attitude of teachers towards otherness, the suspension of disbelief about the values, beliefs and behaviours of others.

(3) **Distancing from one's own culture** – this allows the teachers to realise their own reactions to the cultural identity and cultural practices of others and to accept other viewpoints and identities.

(4) **Development of active learning skills** – the training activities require from teachers to take an active role in the learning process, to analyse and solve problems, discover new information, work collaboratively with peers by demonstrating tolerance, patience and reciprocity, and reflect on their own learning, past experiences and progress.

(5) **Careful selection of the content of teaching materials** – the materials used for the purposes of teacher training need to integrate topics relevant to the school context and to the specifics of the cultural groups with which the teachers work, as well as foster teachers' abilities for cultural observation, interpretation and evaluation.

Bearing in mind that intercultural learning is not simply a process of changing learners' values, but a process of making these values "explicit and conscious" [Byram, Nichols and Stevens, 2001: 7], we can claim that the most suitable methods for applying the suggested principles in teacher education are the *interactive methods* (e.g. discussions, case studies, storytelling, problem-solving, games, brainstorming, role plays). The reasons for choosing interactive methods are as follows:

- interactive methods demand from learners to work actively in pairs and groups and to collaborate with each other;
- in interactive learning the trainer is a moderator, a facilitator of learners' experience;
- learners are able to choose how to organize their work and roles within the pair or the group so that they complete the task;

- learners exert different types of control – self-control, peer control, direct and indirect control;
- a positive and stimulating learning climate is created.

The proposed didactic principles and interactive methods constitute the methodological framework of a 30-hour teacher training course of Bulgarian school teachers of Roma pupils from the Ruse district developed under the framework of a project entitled "Integrated approach of Ruse Municipality for integration of Roma and other vulnerable groups on the territory of Ruse district" developed under the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme (2015 – 2018). As it is focused on a specific target group of learners, the authors of the current paper, who were involved as teacher trainers and materials designers in the specified project, had to add another dimension to the conceptual framework described above as they had to decide on the content of the teacher training course. Since the aim of the teacher training was to sensitize the target group participants to the principles of intercultural education and to develop their competences to approach diversity in their classrooms, we decided to include topics that would provide teachers with theoretical knowledge and practical skills related to topics such as: culture, dynamics of culture, otherness and diversity, stereotypes, prejudice, intercultural competence, intercultural education, learning one's own and the target culture, the cultural specifics of the Roma community in Bulgaria. The expected changes which we intended to make addressed the cognitive, the affective and the behavioural domains of teachers:

- the *cognitive domain* – as a result of the training teachers are expected to have enriched knowledge and deeper understanding of phenomena and cultural practices from their own and the Roma culture achieved through activities that involve the teachers in the collection and interpretation of data, the comparison and contrast of cultural practices and phenomena on the basis of explicit criteria, the critical reading of texts or images.
- the *affective domain* – teachers' participation in the training will allow them to reconsider their own stereotypes or attitudes towards members of specific cultural groups. They will have the chance to approach their own culture from the perspective of an outsider and to distance themselves from the positive image they have of it. The activities which contribute to the development of these outcomes involve teachers in the analysis of critical incidents and require their identification with characters in stories or in presented texts, as well as participation in role plays or simulations.
- the *behavioural domain* – the learning activities which are focused on the behavioural domain will foster the development of teachers' awareness of the diversity in behaviours in their own and in the target culture and will help them acquire an ability to react adequately to different culturally-embedded behaviour models.

The validity and reliability of the proposed conceptual framework has been piloted with 178 school teachers from the Ruse region during the period May 2016 – October 2016, but the results of the piloting cannot be presented and discussed in the current paper due to the limitations imposed by the length of the exposition, therefore, they will be reported in another publication.

CONCLUSION

The presented conceptual framework of multicultural teacher training is just an attempt to contribute to the development of shared understanding of educationalists to the content and interlocking elements which constitute the learning experiences of teachers who work with a diverse group of learners. Still, a more systematic approach is needed to distinguish the domains in greater detail, to pinpoint the competences and skills needed by teachers who teach Roma students and to provide sufficient information on the ways in which the acquisition of these competences could be assessed. Lead by the belief that a conceptual framework is a document that fosters stability and common standards for teacher training, we expect that the proposed conceptual framework will trigger future research on the topic and will contribute to the creation of a more sophisticated multicultural teacher education methodologies.

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