

УДК 372:37 (439)

Hungary: 0009-0006-3387-7337

**LIPCSEI Imre,**  
*doktor PhD, tanszékvezető főiskolai tanár,*  
*Gál Ferenc Egyetem, Pedagógia kar,*  
*Gyermeknevelési és Módszertani Tanszék*  
 Угорщина, м. Сегед

## MULTICULTURALISM IN PRESCHOOLS AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

**Abstract.** *The social and cultural environment of kindergartens and schools went under considerable changes during the passed decades. This affected greatly teachers as well, since children with wide range of economical, cultural and family background bring varied moral values with themselves to preschools or elementary schools. Children of migrant workers, refugees, immigrants create growing diversity which require new competences from teachers. Incorporation of multiculturalism in schools now is beyond question. Therefore education policy shall give major priority to the inclusion of cultural varieties: different religions, diverse traditions and customs. During multicultural education, it is a basic task that we should enable students to develop competences by which they may get to know and cooperate with multicultural groups of different traditions, which sometimes follow other values as well.*

**Keywords:** *tolerance, tradition, integration, identity, inclusion, receptivity.*

## МУЛЬТИКУЛЬТУРАЛІЗМ У ДОШКІЛІ ТА ПОЧАТКОВІЙ ШКОЛІ

**Анотація.** *Соціальне та культурне середовище дитячих садків і шкіл зазнало значних змін протягом останніх десятиліть. Це значною мірою вплинуло і на вчителів, оскільки діти з різним економічним, культурним та сімейним походженням приносять з собою в дошкільні заклади та початкові школи різні моральні цінності.*

*Діти трудових мігрантів, біженців, іммігрантів створюють зростаюче розмаїття, яке вимагає від педагогів нових компетенцій. Впровадження мультикультуралізму в школах зараз не викликає сумнівів. Тому освітня політика повинна надавати основний пріоритет включенню культурного розмаїття: різних релігій, різноманітних традицій і звичаїв. Під час мультикультурної освіти основним завданням є надання учням можливості розвивати компетенції, за допомогою яких вони зможуть пізнавати і співпрацювати з мультикультурними групами з різними традиціями, які іноді також дотримуються інших цінностей.*

*Ключові слова: толерантність, традиція, інтеграція, ідентичність, інклюзія, сприйнятливість.*

**Introduction.** The social and cultural environment of the school and the kindergarten has gone through significant changes over the last decades. Besides institutions, all this has strongly affected teachers since children having different economic, cultural and family background arrive at kindergarten and school with different levels of education and other moral values. The children of immigrant workers, refugees and other immigrants keep on increasing this diversity, which requires teachers to have new competences. It is beyond doubt that multiculturalism has moved in education as well. But when did multiculturalism appear?

While browsing in specialized literature we cannot find a uniform view in relation to multiculturalism. Some people think it can be traced back to the past decades, but those grounded in reality admit that this is not a new, but rather a rediscovered and reinterpreted term, since the coexistence of peoples, and thus the coexistence of cultures and religions had been realized long before the spread of the concept. Multiculturalism has come into the limelight again since the second half of the 20th century, and this is largely due to the fact that new cultures, religions and conventions have emerged in increasingly heterogeneous societies as a result of which contradictions have occurred more and more strongly. The endeavour to get acquainted with other people has become a pre-requisite of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, since by the reappraisal of «otherness», primarily distinctness has come into focus.

**The Necessity of Multicultural Education.** In the European Union, educational policy experts have realized the fact that they can reduce the disadvantages of minorities, different ethnic groups and immigrant families if they help them integrate into society. All this has two basic guidelines: adults have to find a job, and in children's case education. To get a job, in addition to basic expertise, people must acquire the language and work culture of the mainstream society. The school must make students belonging to different races, sexes, ethnic and cultural groups as well as other social classes get familiar with one another's culture, habits and other values important for them.

Nowadays multicultural education is being used in a broader sense. It does not only refer to ethnic minorities, but it also includes individuals of different sex, age, religion, abilities and needs as well as several social groups being different from one another because of their social and geographical endowments. Similarly, all the educational issues related to them are associated with the interpretation of this concept.

Schools engaged in multicultural education are primarily expected to develop communication capabilities that support co-operation with a variety of cultures and cultural groups. Children need to have such competences, which can help their tolerance, acceptance of each other and their cognition of different customs and traditions. If schools manage to achieve all this, social inclusion may become easier, the marginalization of certain groups could be avoided, and the appearance of many conflicts could be prevented as well. There is a view according to which new teaching contents have to appear in the curriculum to achieve all these goals.

It is true that schools have to follow social changes, too. In education, the acceptance of diversity, different religions and traditions must increasingly get priority. Furthermore, we must also make students understand the fact that not everybody thinks and behaves the way as they got accustomed to. We must make them get familiar with otherness, and we must also make them feel the claim to know other people. To get acquainted with other people and nations, we have to know their history, culture, religion and the moral values associated with them. We are going to understand only in this way why and what they are doing, and even if they show their emotions and wishes differently, they do not have bad intentions, they only express themselves differently. It is important that they should accept and consider values being different from theirs to be natural.

Education and culture are regarded as important fields in the European Union as well. The Preamble of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union declares that «the Union contributes to preserving and improving common values whereas it respects the diversity of the European people's culture and traditions as well as the national identity of its member states». (Preamble) Article 14 discusses the right to education. It declares that everybody has the right to free education, parents have the right to provide for their children the appropriate education in accordance with their religious, ideological and pedagogical beliefs. Article 22. lays the foundations of multiculturalism: «*the Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity*». (11.8; 12.)

The XIII Chapter included in the consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union can be related to all these issues which deal with culture in article 167. In the first paragraph, it is stated that «*the Union contributes to the prosperity of the member states' culture respecting their national and regional diversity, at the same time emphasizing the common cultural heritage*». (12. 167.) The promotion of cooperation between the member states is considered to be important as follows:

« – to improve the dissemination of knowledge concerning the culture and history of European nations;  
 – to preserve and protect the cultural heritage of European significance;  
 – non-commercial cultural exchanges;  
 – artistic and literary creations, the audiovisual sector included, too» (12. 167).

From the above mentioned facts, it can be felt that the European Union pays attention to the member states' opinion which have always given utterance to their strong opinions in the field of education and culture against community rules. In this respect, stemming from historical traditions, the member states' anxiety for their own educational system and culture appears, too. It is controversial whether their diversity and national culture would get damaged or not during the process of standardization. This latter aspect is also important because of the influence the globalization process exerts on culture and the youth. In accordance with all this, the Constitution confirms the member states' will that they do not want to change their previous educational and cultural policy, namely the European Union respects the member states' diverse cultural character and the fact that they shape their educational system and curriculums at national level.

**The role of kindergartens and schools in multicultural education.** During multicultural education, different needs and requirements of a society with a variety of cultural backgrounds are emphasized. Due to a broadening of migration such an educational policy is required which allows the cultural particularities of minorities to be maintained during the educational process.

For all this to be successful, inclusion and receptivity must appear in pedagogical methods. One must accept every kind of group which has useful values even for the majority middle class children. The basic guideline of multicultural education lies in the fact that equal opportunity, equal rights to education and the ban on discrimination must also be available to every citizen, thus to immigrants and to children belonging to minorities as well. People belonging to ethnic minorities have the same rights as the members of the mainstream society, namely the preservation and transmission of their culture is a universal human right. In developed countries, experts have realized that conflicts must be avoided, and people must strive for peaceful coexistence instead. Therefore, they try to improve the minorities' plight in various ways, thus for example they make it possible for the immigrants' children to have access to education in their mother tongue, separate programmes are organized for the minorities, scholarships are established, their further education is promoted, higher education quotas are provided for them, and equal opportunity is supported even by positive discrimination as well. All this is often carried out with the help of the slogan of democracy, cultural pluralism and equality (Forray, Hegedűs (3. 391).

Banks thinks it is an important dimension to decrease prejudices in multicultural education. In this respect, he describes his strategies and approaches to children's races, different ethnic groups, sexes, religions, the poor and the rich, old and young people as well as to individuals of different abilities. The decrease of prejudices can largely be facilitated by the introduction of new pedagogical methods and the rethinking of the already available techniques. During the development of cooperative techniques, teachers have clearly adopted the view that the school success of children belonging to disadvantaged minorities or ethnic groups can significantly be improved through cooperative learning situations. All this improves not only the self esteem of children pushed into the background till then, but they can also win their classmates' acknowledgement and receptivity. If children being in the background feel that they are necessary in the community, their work is also useful for the group, and the other children rely on what they are doing, then their attitude changes, too. They accept themselves as they are. In the kindergarten, children are already aware of the fact whose parents are richer, since they can see where their mates live in what car they are given a lift to nursery school, where their mates go on holiday. But they also know who are cleverer, who can draw more nicely who can recite poems by themselves at the nursery school festivity. The ranking is soon formed among children which they take along to school. That is why the receptive milieu is needed in order that everybody can be aware of their importance in the group.

**Multicultural Education Against Prejudice and Rejection.** In multicultural society, people belonging to different minorities, ethnic groups and races willy nilly are in contact with one another in several fields. In public places, they cannot avoid

one another. It is true that sometimes people belonging to the majority endeavour to isolate themselves. Because of their prejudices, they reject the common programmes with «*other people*», and if it is possible, they visit such places where they can be together with people of similar social status. According to Aronson (1.1.), children with different family background must already be accustomed to cooperation in school. Cooperation can reduce rejection and aggression not only in schools, but also in society. For this purpose, he elaborated the mosaic method which he began to employ more than thirty years ago. In a town in Texas, it was thought that it was enough to reduce and later on cease prejudice and rejection if mixed classes are set up at school where Afro-American, white and Spanish children are together. However, instead of the expected positive result, exactly its contrary happened. According to Aronson, the continuous competition only increased prejudices and aggression among children, therefore he formed such groups within a class in which every child had their own task and role, and they could be successful only if they were working together. They listened to, helped and assessed one another; moreover the other children's performance was important for themselves. Rejection and aggression can be pushed into the background if young people of different performance, family background and origin are obliged to cooperate with one another within the classrooms if they acquire syllabus material in small groups. The method has produced good results: aggression has significantly decreased in those classes in which the teachers were teaching children like this. Aronson thinks it is with the help of good education that we can struggle against prejudice, since it is based on rejection, mainly in a bad economic situation, when people are looking for scapegoats they can blame. But if people get to know and appreciate one another, prejudice may decrease, at least in America it did work. It is important to evaluate these experiences because in Central Europe, violence appears increasingly in schools. Similarly, tension can be felt more and more in classrooms among children of different origin. Aronson believes the mosaic method is not a wonder weapon, but it is just one of the elements of the fight against rejection. Besides all this, the family background, the milieu and what the media is transmitting are very important. He reassures those teachers who want to test this method that it is very simple: they only have to follow ten steps.

1. Divide students into 5-or 6-person jigsaw groups. The groups should be diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, and ability.

2. Appoint one student from each group as the leader. Initially, this person should be the most mature student in the group.

3. Divide the day's lesson into 5-6 segments. For example, if you want history students to learn about Eleanor Roosevelt, you might divide a short biography of her into stand-alone segments on: (1) Her childhood, (2) Her family life with Franklin and their children, (3) Her life after Franklin contracted polio, (4) Her work in the White House as First Lady, and (5) Her life and work after Franklin's death.

4. Assign each student to learn one segment, making sure students have direct access only to their own segment.

5. Give students time to read over their segment at least twice and become familiar with it. There is no need for them to memorize it.

6. Form temporary «expert groups» by having one student from each jigsaw group join other students assigned to the same segment. Give students in these expert groups time to discuss the main points of their segment and to rehearse the presentations they will make to their jigsaw group.

7. Bring the students back into their jigsaw groups.

8. Ask each student to present her or his segment to the group. Encourage others in the group to ask questions for clarification.

9. Float from group to group, observing the process. If any group is having trouble (e. g., a member is dominating or disruptive), make an appropriate intervention. Eventually, it's best for the group leader to handle this task. Leaders can be trained by whispering an instruction on how to intervene, until the leader gets the hang of it.

10. At the end of the session, give a quiz on the material so that students quickly come to realize that these sessions are not just fun and games but really count. Aronson (1.1.)

The essence of the method lies in the fact that everybody receives a certain slice of the curriculum of a particular day, and by questioning one another about their lessons, they put together the whole curriculum. They need one another's help in order that the whole image can be completed. In this situation, they do not want to point out the other student's weaknesses. On the contrary, they need to know the other students' good qualities, since they have to harmonize their activity. White children can experience that Afro-American students can also carry out the tasks they have been entrusted with, and they can also see that their Afro-American mates are neither stupid nor lazy. Stereotypes have begun to fade. Children have become more friendly and more empathetic, and they can understand one another much better because while they were solving problems, it was important for them to pay attention to one another.

**The Levels of Multiculturalism.** *After Gorski, Torgyik (10.45.)* defined multicultural education at three levels. According to them, multiculturalism also appears at the level of the individual, the school community and the society which can exist independently from one another, and can be interrelated as well.

At the individual level of education, teachers play, naturally, the most decisive role who keep the closest contact with the children. Their personal exemplification is a pattern for their students, therefore it is important what they say, and how they behave. Of course, it is difficult to meet all the expectations, since teachers are patterns not only in kindergartens and schools, but they also have to behave in the other fields of life in such a way to suggest positive moral values.

During education, one must pay attention to both direct and indirect influences. In many cases, while children are being disciplined or praised, the other children also get something from the teacher's «message». The fact what teachers allow while children are playing and expressing their opinions, or when they take part in competitions is a signal concerning their attitude to children belonging to different social groups. Similarly, it is important to know how teachers will be able to stay grounded in reality while making their decision, and to what extent they give freedom to their students. It is also decisive for children how their teachers can handle conflicts. Do they take on keen issues from a social point of view, too? How do they

handle the problems in connection with Gypsy children? Many teachers do not know what to do if Gypsy children do not go to school, or if they do not behave with their mates or teachers in a suitable way. I think no special treatment is needed, since it is not good for anybody if teachers apply a different standard. It is exactly discrimination that is the worst for everybody. Of course, teachers must get familiar with the habits and traditions of the Gypsies which must be respected, but they have to formulate the same ethical requirements for everybody in the group. When we talk about the community, we think of all the persons to be found in kindergartens and schools: like children, the kindergarten teacher, the teacher and people helping the educators with their work, the other people working in the institution are in touch with one another as well. It is not irrelevant how participants in education or other individuals being indirectly in contact with children can handle their prejudices with regard to people and children belonging to different social, ethnic, minority, cultural, religious and age groups. Children react sensitively to all kinds of manifestations targeted at them; moreover they can even decode the nonverbal communication quite well, too. For this reason, it is important that in the institution, everybody must be receptive, tolerant and understanding. The social level of multicultural education is determining for the two previous levels, too. When handling social problems, it may be a step forward if the kindergarten and the school do not point out a certain ethnicity from the possible identities of the individual or the group, and with this, they should not give an absolute priority to it, either. The formation of a more complex identity must be enhanced, so multiculturalism highlights that approach according to which diversity is a normal thing. Of course, it does not mean that we consider cultural difference to be non-existent, but it is just one variant from several possible identities. We must make people realize that it is natural that every society is fairly complex which is divided in many ways.

**Multicultural – Intercultural Education.** The two concepts are often alternately used, occasionally as the synonym of each other. That is why in specialized literature, several experts have already tried to resolve this situation: From the concepts of multiculturalism/interculturalism, nowadays the concept of interculturalism is only used by the European specialized literature when it comes to dynamics, namely the interaction between cultures, education and socialization. Consequently, it comes to intercultural education and educational policy rather than multiculturalism. In Hungary in the middle of the 2000s, it was possible to elaborate special and cross-programs within a tender. Multicultural-intercultural education also came into the limelight on this occasion the program of which related to higher education was elaborated by a team.

The subject has the following objectives:

- during training, we must enable students to get familiar with the origin and the phenomena of social tension, and how to handle these problems;
- we must prepare students to relieve mutual aversion and mistrust which can be traced back to belonging to different ethnic, religious and social groups, and how to improve mutual understanding and solidarity;
- we must make our students realize that in Hungarian public education the largest domestic minority are the Gypsies, and to make the relationship between the

Gypsies and the mainstream society more harmonious is a common interest. Therefore, they have to broaden their knowledge about the Gypsies' history, traditions and habits which they are supposed to build in their educational work during the integrated education of non-Roma and Gypsy children.

I think the third group of problem does not affect only Hungarian public education. In the neighbouring countries, a significant number of Gypsy children are also involved in public education which increasingly raises the issue of elaborating and refining the methodology of integrated education.

The content of the subject Multicultural-Intercultural Education can be summarized as the result of the project in the following way:

- Cultural diversity in the European states, the historical roots of national, religious and cultural heterogeneity: migration, conquest, migrant ethnic groups, refugees and the groups of settled employees, etc.

- Standpoints, disputes in connection with the concept of multiculturalism and interculturalism, the social and educational policy of the coexistence between ethnic groups of different cultural traditions.

- The attitude of the mainstream society's members to minority groups of different cultural traditions: receptivity and exclusion. The phenomena of prejudices, their possible causes and consequences. The perpetuation of aggression and conflicts between «foreigners» and the members of the mainstream society, the increase of social defencelessness and segregation at settlement level.

- The receptive and cooperative attitude, the conditions of communication between cultures. The resources and manners of familiarization with different traditions. Library, museum and multimedia resources.

- Pedagogical procedures in the service of intercultural education. The continuous familiarization with laws, the follow up of tender opportunities.

- On the basis of historical and ethnographic works, films as well as exhibitions, inquiry about the history, spiritual and material culture, traditions of Gypsies, their social groups and about the creation of Gypsy artists.

- Personal inquiry about some traits of the culture, language, traditions and family education in a Gypsy family.

By testing the program, we can safely say even if it did not fully achieve its goals, it still lived up to our expectations. Of course, the desired attitude did not take shape in every student, namely there were several students who did not fulfill the subject, but there were some other students who managed to get close to Gypsy culture. According to them, they succeeded in learning a lot of interesting things which they had not previously understood, but from that time on, they knew why and what Gypsy people were doing. In addition to becoming familiar with their culture, other students were getting emotionally closer to Gypsy children. Their prejudices soon disappeared, and affection caused pleasure to them, since by feeling love and goodwill, the children were nearly renewed. Till then, the stubborn, undisciplined and arrogant children endeavoured to get closer to their teachers. Appreciation and care which children had missed up to that time were important for them.



**Summary.** Many people believe that if in pedagogy new and newer discoveries are revealed, they must be followed slavishly. Of course, there are novelties, which are induced by social, political and economic changes, so they cannot be ignored. However, it may increase the efficiency of our work if from the specialist literature we only give credence to valuable and well-argued writings based on proven foreign and domestic experiences. It is important that the practicing teachers should have confidence in themselves, the results of their work and in all the methods which they have refined for many years. It is important for us to know the specialist literature, but having consulted our professionally reliable colleagues' opinion, we have to interpret the facts described filtered through our own experiences. Sometimes we can reject some of the ideas, but the useful ones must be incorporated into our work.

It is this way that we must act with the diverse multicultural literature as well. Let us compare our experiences to those in regions where several nationalities have lived together for centuries. In Hungary there are quite a few such settlements whose inhabitants certainly know more about multiculturalism than the specialists who can only write about it. But we cannot say that we have nothing to do in this respect. The long ago proven reflexes do not always work, and the world around us is constantly changing. It is therefore important to collect information from abroad on successful attempts at multiculturalization, and we should try to adapt those successful approaches as well. In spite of the fact that there are also a number of unresolved issues abroad (let us think of the Belgians, the Spaniards and the French, etc.) let us be receptive. Let us combine the best methods from other countries to the values of our confined region, let us compare them to our socially recognized colleagues' experiences, and by gradually observing their effects let us try to introduce them to our work.

It is important that we should make it possible for children to communicate with other groups which may help them accept cultural differences and otherness, and behave in tolerant ways. Multicultural education may prevent certain groups from becoming marginalized, and due to it, occasional violent conflicts could be avoided, too. In school, it is necessary to make it unambiguous for everyone (no matter where they may belong to) that the relationship between the minority and the mainstream society must be harmonized, since mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence must be regarded as a natural claim of society.

## **Bibliography**

1. Aronson, E.: The jigsaw classroom. Sage Publications, (1978). [www.jigsaw.org](http://www.jigsaw.org)
2. [2023. 10. 09. 19.00]
3. James A. Banks – Cherry McGee Banks (Eds.): Handbook of research on multicultural education. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2001.
4. Forray R. Katalin-Hegedűs András: Cigány gyerekek szocializációja. (Socialization of Gypsy children) Budapest. 1998.
5. Forray R. Katalin: A multikulturális /interkulturális nevelésről. (About Multicultural/Intercultural Education). Iskolakultúra 6-7 2003. 18-27.p.

6. Mihály Ildikó: A multikulturális nevelésről – a világban. (About Multicultural Education in the World). Új Pedagógiai Szemle, 4. 2001. 58-65.p.

7. Mikael Luciak: Minority schooling and intercultural education: A comparison of recent developments in the old and new EU member states. *Intercultural Education*, 2006. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14675980500502370>

8. Tusa Cecilia: A multikulturális nevelés létjogosultsága és szükségessége az Európai Unióban. (The Justification and the Need of Multicultural Education in the European Union). <http://www.osztalyfonok.hu/cikk.php?id=221>

9. Torgyik Judit: A multikulturális nevelés globális környezetben. (Multicultural education in a global environment) *Educatio* 31. 2022.

10. Torgyik Judit: The School That Students Could Enjoy. *Eruditio-Educatio*, 4. 2021.

11. Torgyik Judit – Karlovitz János: Multikulturális nevelés.(Multicultural Education). Budapest, (2006.) [http://europa.eu/documentation/legislation/index\\_hu.htm](http://europa.eu/documentation/legislation/index_hu.htm) [2023.10.01. 21.00]

12. Az Európai Unió Alapjogi Chartája(Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union) [https://commission.europa.eu/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/eu-charter-fundamental-rights\\_hu\(2023.11.12.\)](https://commission.europa.eu/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/eu-charter-fundamental-rights_hu(2023.11.12.))

13. Az európai unió működéséről szóló szerződés. XIII. fejezet (Treaty on the functioning of the European Union. XIII. chapte) [http://data.europa.eu/eli/treaty/tfeu\\_2012/oj](http://data.europa.eu/eli/treaty/tfeu_2012/oj)

Note. The titles of the above-mentioned works have been translated from Hungarian into English by the translator of this essay.

*Стаття надійшла до редакції 25.08.2023 р.*

*Стаття прийнята до друку 09.09.2023 р.*