THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS AND THE CULTURAL ORIGIN OF THE PUPILS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Lulzim Murtezani (Macedonia)

Abstract: The multicultural education affects all phases of the effective classes. Through the multicultural curricula the children learn about themselves and the others. In this way they analyze the beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviors which are characteristic for certain cultures. The members of these cultures need to have greater self-confidence and simultaneously develop evaluation and understanding of the other cultures. Although they learn in the same buildings, it is not a guarantee that quality information has been provided for both cultures. To better illustrate, if the texts, i.e. textbooks and other teaching resources do not provide contents with equal quality, equally objective notions of the differences in the existing cultures of the pupils, then the goals of the multicultural living will be that much more distant.

The cultural origin of the child is determined by its ethnic identity, social and economic status, the religion, mother tongue, gender and experiences in certain groups and sub-groups. Taking such a set of factors as a starting point, this paper highlight the importance of the basic dimensions (we consider them as challenges) of the multicultural education, for which Banks (1993) gives an opinion, as follows: 1. Integration of the contents; 2. Building the knowledge; 3. Equity pedagogy; 4. Consolidating the school culture, and 5. Reduction of the prejudice. These dimensions are the embodiment of the spirit of the multicultural in the educational practice.

Key words: Multiculturalism; cultural origin; equal pedagogy; dimensions.

Introduction

The instructions for multicultural understanding can assist in raising the academic expectations of the pupils from the minorities and to contribute for decreasing the negative stereotypes. It is assumed that in order for the multicultural programs to be efficient, it is necessary for them to incorporate the social, historic and political contexts (Nieto, 1997).

Hence, it is logical to expect that they will meet the following conditions:

To teach the children to recognize, accept and appreciate the cultural differences; and

To "imprint" in the pupils, during their education, the sense of responsibility and commitment for the work in the direction of the democratic ideals, justice, equality, and democracy (Manning & Baruth, 1996,p.3).

Providing equal physical teaching conditions: school buildings, classrooms, halls, yards, and sports fields, is not enough to develop a multicultural awareness and behavior of the pupils. Although they learn in the same buildings, it is not a guarantee that quality information has been provided for both cultures. To better illustrate, if the texts, i.e. textbooks and other teaching resources do not provide contents with equal quality, equally objective notions of the differences in the existing cultures of the pupils, then the goals of the multicultural living will be that much more distant.

Ethnic identity and student achievements

The academic achievements of the pupils are closely connected to the cultural belonging. Explicitly and implicitly, they are symbolic to the democracy of the society, culture and the current trends, as well as the engagement of the teachers and the persons responsible of the education. Also, they reflect the attitudes of the parents, and the culture in general, towards the education (Stevenson, 1990; Marin, 1994; Vasta et al., 2007; Shweder, 1991; Lerner, 1991; Turner, 1987; and Zinberg, 1976). In the teaching practice, when the teacher calls to the cultural values appropriate for the pupils, i.e. their cultural identity, the participation in the classes increases evidently and the degree of the achievements increases as well (Tharp, according to Slavin, 2006). These achievements are an essential indicator of the intellectual education and competence, as well as the most important prerequisite for the individual and educational prosperity of the person. This characteristic brings the academic achievements of the pupils to one vital issue for the politics, and the educational and scientific-research activity. The assessment of the success of the students in the study program usually focuses on the academic achievements, but in many educational institutions, their achievements and attitudes are also assessed (Banks, 1995). In other words, the assessment of the academic achievements includes all the means which are used in the schools, to formally measure the performances of the pupils.

The challenges of cultural determination

Taking into consideration the significant role played by the culture in the process of

education, one must ask the question: Is the cultural belonging of the pupils, who attend classes in the elementary education, reflected in their academic achievements?

The cultural origin of the child is determined by its ethnic identity, social and economic status, the religion, mother tongue, gender and experiences in certain groups and sub-groups. Taking such a set of factors as a starting point, we can identify the basic dimensions (we consider them as challenges) of the multicultural education, for which Banks (1993) gives an opinion, as follows: 1. Integration of the contents; 2. Building the knowledge; 3. Equity pedagogy; 4. Consolidating the school culture, and 5. Reduction of the prejudice. I am deeply convinced that these dimensions are the embodiment of the spirit of the multicultural in the educational practice, and I will pay maximum attention during the structuring and implementation of the research project.

The transformation from multicultural to intercultural education

Usually people interpret the surrounding occurrences and people through the prism of their own values (Myers, 2003) and the points of view of their ego. Everyone has personal expectations, values, convictions, concepts and many other subjective traits which determine whether the surrounding occurrences and people them will be valued as good or bad. Cognitive psychology elaborates this tendency, in whose frames the theory of the famous epistemologist Piaget (1971) suggests good strategies for getting to know oneself objectively and then to get to know the others. Namely, Piaget stresses the need for decentered thinking in the act of interpretation of the others, during which we are trained to see their perspective of things. If we succeed in this, we will know more about the others, their needs, attitudes, traditions and cultures, and thus, we will be able to better accept them and collaborate with them.

The decentered thinking (fig. 1) will enable us to overcome the existing limitations in the interpretations of the behavior of other people. Most of all, this refers to overcoming the prejudices and stereotypes of ethnic, national, religious and other character. The result of this act will be a more open and tolerant relation with those with a culture different from ours. This thinking may be nurtured in the frames of a democratic society i.e. the school, where equal education for everyone is a top priority. These are most of all strategies which promote cooperation among the students, shared responsibility and goals, during which the cultural parallelisms among them will be minimized. With the goal to overcome the stressing of the differences among the students.
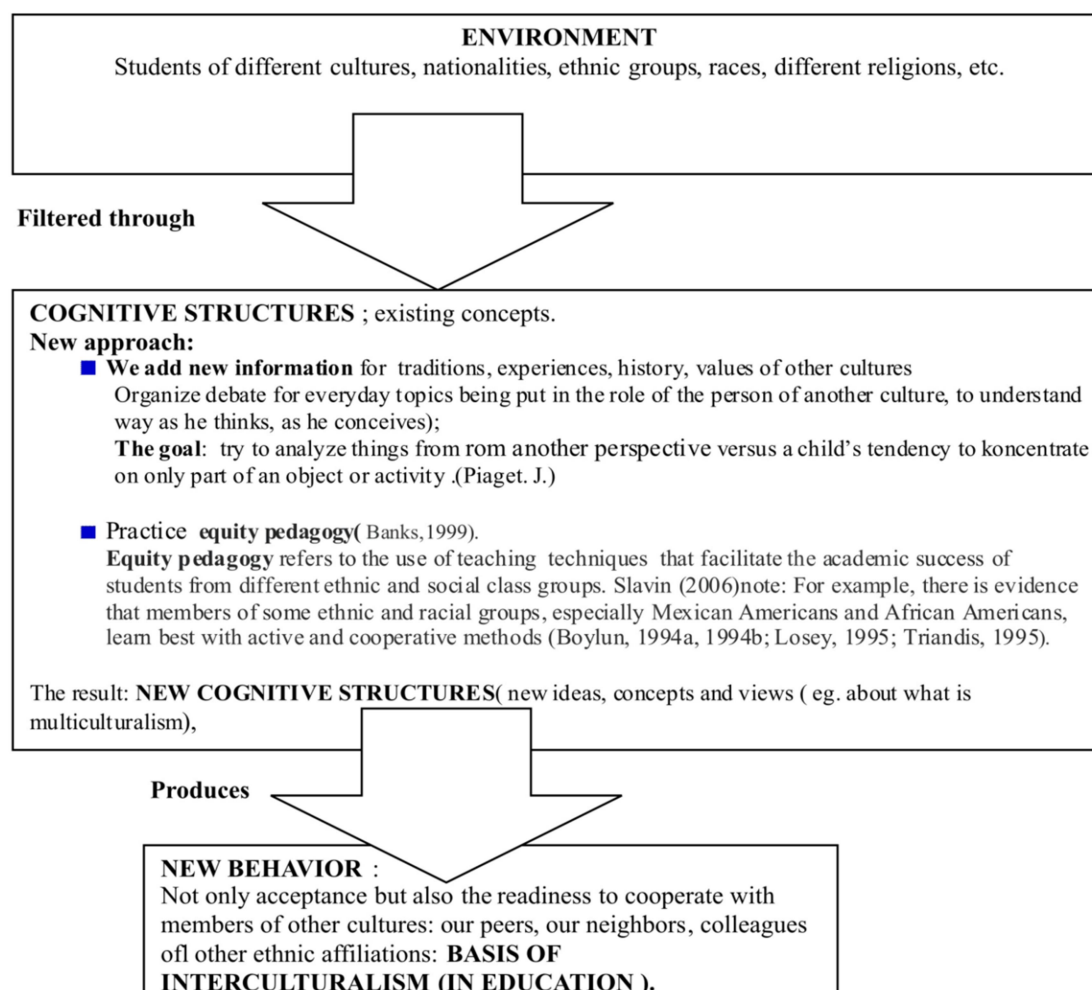
FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO INTERCULTURALISM

ENVIRONMENT
Students of different cultures, nationalities, ethnic groups, races, different religions, etc.

Filtered through

COGNITIVE STRUCTURES ; existing concepts.
New approach:
- **We add new information** for traditions, experiences, history, values of other cultures
  Organize debate for everyday topics being put in the role of the person of another culture, to understand way as he thinks, as he conceives);
  The goal: try to analyze things from rom another perspective versus a child's tendency to koncentrate on only part of an object or activity .(Piaget. J.)

- Practice **equity pedagogy**(Banks,1999).
  Equity pedagogy refers to the use of teaching techniques that facilitate the academic success of students from different ethnic and social class groups. Slavin (2006)note: For example, there is evidence that members of some ethnic and racial groups, especially Mexican Americans and African Americans, learn best with active and cooperative methods (Boylun, 1994a, 1994b; Losey, 1995; Triandis, 1995).

The result: **NEW COGNITIVE STRUCTURES**(new ideas, concepts and views (eg. about what is multiculturalism),

Produces

NEW BEHAVIOR :
Not only acceptance but also the readiness to cooperate with members of other cultures: our peers, our neighbors, colleagues ofl other ethnic affiliations: **BASIS OF INTERCULTURALISM (IN EDUCATION).**

Figure 1: The transformation from multicultural to intercultural education

Banks (1993) stated the five such basic dimensions, from which we will mention in the paper the so called: Equity pedagogy – which promotes education for everyone in the same way regardless of the cultural differences. Through equity pedagogy, the importance of the development of positive interactions among the students from different ethnic groups in the function of creating tolerant and democratic attitudes towards the others is stressed (fig. 1). As we have mentioned previously, an important precondition to get to know those who do not belong to our culture is the readiness to take their point of view of things. Apart from this, it is not sufficient to think cognitively about the other cultures we live with, but first of all we need to get close to them emotionally. This will be achieved if the students try to perceive the

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things and traditions of the other cultures from their point of view as well, and not only from one's own. Only in this way, we may contribute for the creation of a stable social school climate (not only here), where we will have ethnic, language and religious diversity, in which the cultural barriers will be removed.

Summary

The cultural specifics are reality and as such they need to be respected in the communication of the children from different cultures. There is a need for change not only of the objective conditions but also of the cognitive ones in people (students) in order to change from multiculturalism to interculturalism. Together with the acceptance of the cultural diversity, the schools need to manage situations of sharing different cultural experiences among the students. Having in mind the theoretical postulates of Piaget's theory for decentered thinking, i.e. the ability to see through the perspective of others, the children, once introduced to their own culture, will be able to better understand the culture of the others.

The building of knowledge from the aspect of multiculturalism means that the ways to get certain cognitions do not have to be the same. In this process the children will be introduced to different notions about the world, which are the result of the history and the shared experience of a group of people, which creates different concepts and philosophies in its members.

An important condition for achieving the aspirations for a modern multicultural climate in schools is the materialization of equal pedagogy (Banks), which highlights values such as collaboration, equality, non-selectiveness, calling onto positive examples from history of how different cultures collaborated and faced reality in different times etc.

In accordance with the theoretical concepts, we finalize the contents of the paper, emphasizing the basic strategies for dealing with, i.e. reducing the prejudices in the students, with a special attention to: a) Intensifying the cooperation among the ones who are the subject of prejudices and the ones who have prejudices; b) Creating conditions for integrated education; c) Amendments of the educational and other institutional policies which render legitimate the division among the students; d) Providing information about the subjects of stereotypes as the most direct way of changing patterns through education; e) Creating conditions for equal pedagogy and f) Building a school – open culture towards diversity.

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Assoc.Prof. PhD *Lulzim Murtezani*

Faculty of Pedagogy "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Skopje, Macedonia

E-mail: Dr.l.m@live.com