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# THE TEACHER AND THE ROMA: PEDAGOGIC AND ANDRAGOGIC CONTEXTS IN RELATION TO INTERCULTURALISM

ABSTRACT. Balvín Jaroslav, *The Teacher and the Roma: Pedagogic and Andragogic Contexts in Relation to Interculturalism* [Nauczyciel i problem Romów. Pedagogiczne i andragogiczne konteksty wielokulturowości]. Studia Edukacyjne nr 25, 2013, Poznań 2013, pp. 231-242. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISBN 978-83-232-2610-9. ISSN 1233-6688

Recently, tensions between the Romany and non-Romany segments of society have been rising, in many cases taking on a certain form of antiziganism. For various professionals it means having to deal with problems such as how to devise and implement suitable methods leading to the mitigation of such tensions and various forms of antiziganism. Teachers constitute one of the major professions that possesses this ability. The hypothesis that we try to prove through our research in the area of inter-ethnic tensions is that communication between teachers and pupils as well as their families can help improve relations between the non-Romany and Romany segments of a multicultural society, thus helping both the Roma and non-Roma fight antiziganism.

**Key words**: antiziganism, pedagogy, teacher, school, Romany pupil, teacher of Romany pupils, tolerance, intercultural communication

### Introduction

Antiziganism is a concept applied to theoretical and practical forms of aggravated hatred on the part of the society's majority to the Roma. It is analogical to anti-Semitism, except that the objects of ethnic hatred are the Roma, not the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Issues concerning current forms of antiziganism (or antigypsyism) in Europe and the world were discussed at the seminar of scientists during the World Romani Festival in Prague in May 2012. The chief editor was the renown Romany linguist from Bulgaria, Hristo Kyuchukov, who is currently teaching at universities in Slovakia and Berlin (*New Faces of Antigypsyism in Modern Europe*, ed. H. Kyuchukov, Prague 2012). The concept of antiziganism was compared with the concept of anti-Semitism in juxtaposition to the economic situation (T. Acton, *Social and Economic Bases of Antigypsyism*, [in:] *New Faces of Antigypsyism in Modern Europe*, ed. H. Kyuchukov, Prague 2012, p. 31-37; M. End, *History* 

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In Czech schools, anti-Semitism is being explained and form part of the curriculum in several subjects, mainly in history, literature, and civic education. The essence of antiziganism, on the contrary, is not being explained at all. This has a number of reasons, mainly the fact that the public conceives the Roma as a marginalized group that has no chance of integrating in the society, unlike the Jews.

Despite that, we are convinced that explaining antiziganism should become part of education, not only on university level, but also secondary and elementary levels, both non-Romany and Romany. Teachers should be informed and educated in this area, even if these issues are not covered in their respective subjects. At present, most constructive in this process are pedagogic curricula oriented on multicultural and intercultural education. As mitigation of inter-ethnic tensions is the objective of this process, communication between the teacher and the Roman pupil's parents.

Pedagogues have emphasized many times the important role of optimal communication between teachers and their pupils' parents. The importance of this relationship has been often proved in numerous research studies. Specific dimension is attributed to communication between teachers who are member of the society's majority with pupils and parents from the minority community, in other words, with the "others".

A specific minority that is considered most problematic, conflicting and handicapped is the Romany ethnic minority. Lately, the relations between the majority and the Romany minority have been very tense. They are evident in various forms of violence between neighboring Romany and non-Romany population in some cities of Czechia and Slovakia. The last case that stirred up the public opinion in Slovakia was a violent act of a policeman in the town of Hurbanovo. During his off-duty time, he walked in on a Romany family and shot three men dead and wounded severely two others. His motif is not as yet clear, but it has already been accused of premeditated, i.e., planned murder. The atmosphere of racial hatred is quite apparent, as various statements on the Internet indicate where gratitude is being expressed to the gunman for taking justice into his hands and demonstrating how to get rid of the "Gypsies"... Last year, a crazy man

of Antigypsyism in Europe: The Social Causes, [in:] New Faces of Antigypsyism, p. 7-15). The theme of antiziganism in home conditions in Bohemia and Slovakia was elaborated by Romologists Eva Davidová, Jarmila Balážová, and Andrea Bučková (E. Davidová, Antigypsyism in Czechoslovakia during the Communist Era (1950-1989), [in:] New Faces of Antigypsyism, p. 16-30; J. Balážová, Antigypsyism in the Czech Republic, [in:] New Faces of Antigypsyism, p. 74-76; A. Bučková, Antigypsyism in Slovakia, [in:] New Faces of Antigypsyism, p. 67-73). On university level, the theme of antiziganism was also addressed in the texts of Jaroslav Balvín and Hristo Kyuchukov (H. Kyuchukov, J. Balvín, Antigypsyism and University Education, [in:] New Faces of Antigypsyism, p. 41-47).

started shooting spree at a Romany family in Devínská Nová Ves (Bratislava), killing seven people and injuring others. In that case, it was probably a case of bad neighborly relations with the Romany family.

An interesting case occurred in the Czech Republic, in the town of Břeclav. The outcome was a severe injury, where a boy lost his kidney and accused three "gypsies". During the investigation that followed, however, it was established that the fifteen-year-old had made up the whole story out of fear of his mother. Namely, he injured himself by falling from the eighth-floor balcony one floor below, while showing off in front of his friends. He was deceiving the whole country with his lie, stirring up considerable anti-Romany hatred in many people. The significant fact is that the whole country believed him due to majority's a priori attitude to the Romany minority. They believed him that it was the Roma who had done it, even before the police could investigate. Singer Michal David had even sent CZK 100,000 of the proceeds from his concert in Břeclav to the "suffering boy" to help him recover "from the attack of the Gypsies". It was supposed to be a symbolic gift to all the victims of violence. Here, again, the attitude and relation of the majority society to the Roma as a whole was at play. Even before the police began to investigate the event, the party that promotes racial hatred called a gathering of its members to Břeclay, where they demanded severe punishment for all Roma. Typically, before learning the facts, a number of regular citizens had joined them there, which aggravated tensions between the majority and the Romany minority.

The scenario in Břeclav was a replay of antiziganist mood as sympathizing citizens joined with the so-called labor party, which promotes racism and hatred to "others", last year I the north of the Czech Republic, in a region known as Šluknov Spur - around the towns of Varnsdorf, Rumburk, and Šluknov. Anti-Roma demonstrations took place there, reacting to certain criminal activities of the Roma who had moved to those towns from elsewhere. They came from other parts of the Czech Republic, forced to leave by their economic situation that made them unable to pay rent. Speculative businessmen, acting in cahoots, had organized the move of the Romany families to the housing settlements in the north. However, the rent amounts and loans from usurious lending organizations (Provident) had merely aggravated the existing problems. Before long, criminal activities emerged, followed by anti-Roma demonstrations. Such was the explanation of the events, the official from the Sluknov Citi Hall agreed, along with Romany coordinators and the director of local Special Education School. My research started in those institutions with the aim of identifying the true reasons for these phenomena. The results of my research were supposed to demonstrate how to overcome problems arising from hatredbased relations between the Romany minority and the Czech majority.

# Practical Application of the Relations between Pedagogy and Andragogics – Research

We are compiling our application as a report of a qualitative research on a theme that we call *Pedagogy and Andragogics in Intercultural Communication between the Roma and the Majority*. This presentation has a longer version containing a complete elaboration of the research and a shorter PowerPoint version for a forty-minute presentation for the public and a twenty-minute inauguration lecture for the Scientific Council of the Pedagogic Faculty of the Masaryk University in Brno. The content and method of both lectures have been compacted in the form of a thematic abstract whose length corresponds to the findings and phenomena followed during the research and leading to identification of the very substance of these phenomena and processes interacting between pedagogy and andragogics in intercultural communication between the Roma and the majority.

The main goal that we point out – as one of the current, concrete pedagogic and andragogic contemporary themes – is the question, whether teachers of Romany pupils can actively and effectively improve intercultural communication between the Roma and the majority through communication with Romany parents. In order to achieve this goal, we prepared eight questions that were given to several groups of respondents, as follows:

- Non-Romany teachers of special and elementary schools in selected localities in Bohemia and Slovakia;
- Romany teachers of special and elementary schools in selected localities in Bohemia and Slovakia;
- Non-Romany experts and specialists in the area of scientific work in romological and multicultural regions in Bohemia and Slovakia;
- Romany experts and specialists in the area of scientific work in romological and multicultural regions in Bohemia and Slovakia;
- Group of external students specializing in andragogics at Tomáš Baťa University in Zlín (Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Pedagogic Sciences);
- Experts from ministerial sections in the Czech and Slovak Republic dealing with educational and social work issues concerning Romany communities;
- Experts from state administration departments and townships in the Czech and Slovak Republic dealing with educational and social work issues concerning Romany communities.

We tried to address schools in the region of the Czech Republic, where the National Labor Party (which proclaims racism and neo-Nazism) organized demonstrations last fall, with participation of certain citizens of the town, against crimes and violence committed by the Roma. The event took place in the Šluknov spur in northern Bohemia near the border with the Federal Republic of Germany and involved the towns of Varnsdorf, Rumburk, and Šluknov. For our research, we selected three schools in these towns:

- Special and Practical School in Rumburk,
- Special and Practical School in Šluknov,
- Special and Practical School in Varnsdorf.

The reason for selecting these schools was that they all are successors of the former special schools, which had a large enrollment of Romany pupils who had no apparent symptoms of mental retardation. Their main handicap was their social and ethno-cultural status. In 2005, with the onset of democratization and elimination of the existing state of affairs, which was subject to much criticism by European and global institutions and human rights organizations, certain solutions of these problems were implemented. Special schools were changed to regular elementary schools, but the change was more formal than genuine. The controversial state of affairs prevailed. We therefore selected these schools to find out how their teachers cooperate with the parents of Romany pupils to eliminate the tensions arising from the situation in education and there spheres. In the effort to identify the very substance of the situation, we can also see opportunities for making use of optimal relations between social andragogics and social pedagogy. We believe that the theme under study is one of the concrete issues that can be solved with the aid of multicultural pedagogy and multicultural andragogics. While working on this research, however, we cannot avoid analyzing the direct effects of the attitude on the part of certain members of the society to the Roma as a general enemy who should be – according the many citizens – eliminate or removed. This ideology is known as anticiganism.

# **Research Questions for Respondents**

- 1) Do you think that good and open-minded communication between teachers and students' parents is important for good communication amongst people in the society? If your answer is YES, why?
- 2) Do you think that such communication between teachers and Romany students' parents in the interest of pupils, i.e., future adult members of the society, is optimal these days? Do you believe that teachers' orientation on holding dialogues with students' parents leads to betterment of the

relations between the majority and minority? On a scale from positive to negative, state the reasons that you believe are causing t.

- 3) Do you view improved communication between teachers and Romany students' parents as a certain model of good interethnic communication in the society, helping to remove tensions, recently occurring not only in the Czech Republic (triangle of tensions in northern Bohemia: Rumburk, Šluknov, Varnsdorf), but also in Slovakia (Hurbanovo, Devínská Nová Ves, etc.) and other places in Europe?
- 4) What variants and options do you see for improving relations between schools and Romany students' families?
  - 5) What problems do schools see in communication with families?
- 6) What experience do you have with communication between teachers and parents?
- 7) Do you think that optimal communication between schools and families could directly help REMOVE INTERETHNIC TNSIONS IN THE SOCIETY?
- 8) What do you think has caused the tension between the Roma and the rest of the population in the Šluknov Spur ad/or other localities, in Slovakia, etc. May teachers' work help mitigate tensions and lead to better tolerance? Would better communication with Romany parents help?

Use this space for additional comment on the above theme.

## On Research Methods

The responses will be subsequently analyzed using methods of qualitative research, particularly the method of forming samples, as per Miovský's terminology.<sup>2</sup> During this process we do not ignore inspiration by other qualitative methods, especially the method of grounded theory.<sup>3</sup> An important and highly inspirational source was the work of P. Gavora entitled *Guide through Qualitative Research Methods*.<sup>4</sup> No less inspirational was the work of J. Hladík and S. Vávrová *Mechanisms of Functioning of Self-development of Students*,<sup>5</sup> where the authors use qualita-

 $<sup>^2\,</sup>$  M. Miovský, Qualitative Approach and Methods in Psychological Research, Prague 2006, p. 220-221.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> S. Strauss, J. Corbinová, Elementary Qualitative Research. Approaches and Methods of Grounded Theory, Boskovice 1999; M. Miovský, Qualitative Approach, p. 227-237; J. Hendl, Qualitative Research. Basic Methods and Application, Prague 2005, p. 243-257; R. Švaříček, K. Šeďová et al., Qualitative Research in Pedagogic Sciences, Prague 2007, p. 84-96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> P. Gavora, Guide through Qualitative Research Methods, Bratislava 2006.

 $<sup>^5</sup>$  J. Hladík, S. Vávrová,  $\it Mechanisms$  of Functioning Self-development of Students, Prague 2011.

tive research methods for analyses of concrete pedagogic issues, using the grounded theory method. They also collected data by means of a focal group, which the authors had selected with reference to Miovský,<sup>6</sup> who defines focal group as one of the most progressive methods of qualitative data collection.<sup>7</sup>

- J. Hendl mentions in his book, *Qualitative Research*, Miles and Huberman's requirements for qualitative research reports.<sup>8</sup> According to what Miles and Huberman (1984) consider minimum requirements, a qualitative study report should have the following parts:
  - 1. Explanation of the focus of the research
- 2. Information on social and historical context of the environment where the research was conducted
  - 3. Information on the natural history of the research
- 4. Basic data for readers, so that they may make their own deductions, along with the author
- 5. Conclusions and description of the broader range of impact of the work on science and the effects it would have

Readers will be acquainted with the results of our research in a subsequent publication to be published in the future.

As an example of the responses, let us mention the ideas and answers 0065pressed by Anina Botošová, a Romany intellectual, pedagogue, and specialist in the Romological and gender agenda at the Ministry of Social Affairs in Bratislava, Slovakia, which readers can find in her article printed in this magazine issue.

The main objective of mine was to show all members of the society, in general, are greatly responsible for improvement of inter-ethnic relations – not merely on the general level, but also as members of various professions. Amongst them, schools, their principals, and teachers play a major role. Moreover, in order to be able to find out, whether schools and teachers have a long-lasting effect on these problems, we have to identify and generalize their views, as well as the views of politicians, civil servants, professionals, pedagogues, etc. I have therefore compiled certain questions for the representatives of these persons, whom I try to ask in the "neuralgic localities of tension" mentioned above. The results (their responses) will be generalized for the purposes of their interpretation in the form of a qualitative survey. I believe that presenting these issues and reasons to the public is important for the creation of a tolerant atmosphere in the society, in addition to being interesting information to the readers of my

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> M. Miovský, Qualitative Approach.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See: J. Hladík, S. Vávrová, *Mechanisms*, p. 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> J. Hendl, Qualitative Research. Basic Methods and Application, Prague 2005, p. 315.

article. Moreover, I would be happy, if my work encouraged reads to more profound contemplation about the problems outlined and the responses obtained.

**Basic Research Issues**: Is it possible to consider the role of good or no-so-good relations between teachers and parents of Romany pupils one of the pedagogic determinants that is or is not an important factor that impacts on the society's conscience and leading to improvement or worsening of relations between the Romany minority and the population's majority?

The questions are posed to concrete persons, not anonymously. I want to conduct my research in locations known as the "ethnic triangle of tensions", e.g., the Šluknov Spur (Rumburk, Šluknov, Varnsdorf), including interviews with the local teachers, school principals, Romany pupils from the local communities, civil servants, municipal officials, and institutions. By means of these questions, as well as my photographic survey, I try to penetrate deeper into the essence of the tensions related to the local Romas' situation, as they have been occurring lately in connection with concrete racially motivated events. The events started with relatively small incidents, often based on lies and misleading or false accusations raised by fifteen-year-olds, whereby the Roma are blamed for everything automatically (like in Břeclav, Liberec, etc.). I will also ask the questions in Slovakia, in the area of Spiš, which has the highest concentration of Romany population in Europe. It should enable us to compare the situation in Bohemia and Slovakia, as well as the views of teachers and other professionals of the essence of interethnic tensions and the options that teachers and schools have to mitigate the tensions.

In the choice of the questions I try avoid the possibility of biased interpretation of the reality (in the sense of suggesting who is more to blame, i.e., the Romany minority or the non-Romany majority). Instead, I aim to make a multidimensional interpretation that, I hope, would in the end, after processing all the answers, contribute new pedagogic and andragogic perspectives.

### Conclusion

It is obvious that tensions in the society keep growing and that the Roma have become a target to blame for many economic problems. These phenomena not only indicate racial intolerance and discrimination, but also phenomena that are accountable to determined antiziganism – i.e.,

hatred, systematic hostility to the Roma and their people as a whole, taking economic problems in the society as pretext. Teachers, as members of an influential educational profession, should manifest the multicultural essence of their professions in this situation. The degree of this tendency in the teaching profession can be ascertained by means of research in the form of various surveys, which is exactly what this study of mine is about. As the author of this text, I presume with confidence that realization of this study is bound to facilitate deeper recognition of the multi-faceted relations between the Roma and non-Roma and demonstrate our professional obligation to assume a concrete standpoint to these issues. Education, intercultural communication, and conscious enlightenment of pupils and their parents, both Romany and non-Romany, is the way to go. Rejecting antiziganism as a trend similar to anti-Semitism is fundamental for teachers' humanitarian mission and their professional ethics.

The theme at issue is important in the light of our discussion about inclusive education. Therefore, it is part of the interpretation of our research and the view of pedagogues and andragogists whom I quote in the Bibliography. As the inclusion theme has a European dimension, we also quote writings issued under the Vyshegrad Fund, guaranteed by the Polish PROM Foundation, and issued as part of the editions of Jaroslav Balvín, Lukasz Kwadrans, and Małgorzata Kowalczyk. 10

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> B. Jachimczak, Gotowość nauczycieli szkół ogólnodostępnych do pracy z uczniem o specjalnych potrzebach edukacyjnych, [in:] Miejsce innego we współczesnych naukach o wychowaniu. Wyzwania praktyki, red. I. Chrzanowska, B. Jachimczak, Łódź 2008, p. 189-200; L. Kwadrans, Education of the Roma in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia - gap confrontation between expectations and reality - comaparative research, Wrocław 2011; T. Turzák, Práva a povinnosti rodičov výnimočného dieťaťa v kontexte kooperácie rodiny a školy, [in:] Klíma školy v 21. Storočí, Banská Bystrica 2008; T. Turzák, R. Polakovičová, Pregraduálna príprava študentov učiteľstva zo špeciálno-pedagogického aspektu a možnosti jej intervencie, [in:] Integrácia teórie a praxe didaktiky ako determinant kvality modernej školy, Košice 2010, p. 171-174; L. Vavreková, Konkretizace demokratického přístupu k romským žákům v Hnutí R Spiš, [in:] Miejsce innego we współczesnych naukach o wychowaniu. Wyzwania praktiki, red. I. Chrzanowska, B. Jachimczak, Łódź 2008, p. 77-93; J. Balvin, A. Vališová, "Shock Process" in Personality Development as Effective Educational Method Applied in Education of Romany Children [in:] Situation of Roma Minority in Czech, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, eds J. Balvin, Ł. Kwadrans, Wrocław 2010, p. 373-382.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Situation of Roma Minority in Czech, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, eds J. Balvin, Ł. Kwadrans, Foundation of Social Integration Prom, Wrocław 2010; Situation of Roma Minority in Czech, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – vol. 2, eds J. Balvin, M.E. Kowalczyk, Ł. Kwadrans, Wrocław 2011; Situation of Roma Minority in Czech, Poland and Slovakia, eds J. Balvin, Ł. Kwadrans, Wrocław 2009.

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## Nauczyciel i problem Romów. Pedagogiczne i andragogiczne konteksty wielokulturowości

#### Streszczenie

Ostatnio rośnie społeczne napięcie między Romami i nie-Romami. Rodzi to potrzebę opracowania i wdrożenia odpowiednich metod prowadzących do złagodzenia tych napięć. Jedną z najważniejszych grup społecznych posiadających zdolność

do łagodzenia tego napięcia są nauczyciele. Nasza hipoteza zakłada, iż nauczyciele poprzez komunikację z dziećmi romskimi i ich rodzicami pomagają całemu społeczeństwu w przezwyciężeniu tego problemu.

**Słowa klucze:** pedagogika, nauczyciel, szkoła, uczeń romski, nauczyciel romskich uczniów, tolerancja, komunikacja międzykulturowa