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## Development perspectives of the intercultural curriculum in Romania

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### Abstract

The article *Development perspectives of the intercultural curriculum in Romania* is based on the multi-disciplinary theoretical framework and also on the inter-disciplinary methodology of the cultural diversity issue. The research presented as part of the article represents the first stage of a multiple directions investigation regarding the subject, and having as a result the development of a methodological framework of the intercultural curriculum. The main tool of investigation consists in a questionnaire applied to a sample of 120 subjects. The results of the research reveal development directions of the intercultural curriculum and confirm the methodological value of the investigation tool.

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*Keywords:* multicultural; intercultural; intercultural education; education’s European dimension; intercultural competences; intercultural curriculum; curriculum’s sociology; European synchronous.

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### 1. Paper rationale

The problematic context of education through and for the values of cultural diversity, and the absorption of intercultural competences by key competences sphere, necessary for a lifetime learning, represent basic arguments of the researches as part of the intercultural curriculum field. According to the documents which analyze public politics, the Romanian legislation has adopted the European stipulations regarding the rights of minorities and also

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the regulation of social relations as part of multicultural communities. These steps will have long term effects with regard to shaping the conscience of intercultural European values, but only if they are reinforced by educational processes based on educational policies, structures and methodological frameworks.

Regarding the theoretical level, the specialty literature in Romania consistently approaches the issue of intercultural education but, as far as the curricular field and the educational practices plan are regarded, the intercultural approach needs to reveal a vision in order to promote intercultural and a methodological framework of curricular resizing. Thus, there are going to be promoted axiological characteristics of an educational process having a strong intention of capitalizing the cultural diversity, while being efficient in developing intercultural competences, from the perspective of European education dimension and in accordance with the Romanian cultural heritage.

The preliminary analyses regarding the intercultural curriculum in Romania encourage us to emphasize the necessity of resizing it, from multiple points of view: a) the consistent scientific foundation, by capitalizing theoretical and methodological contributions belonging to multiple socio-human fields (anthropology, sociology, intercultural psychology, social psychology, pedagogy), in an integrative manner; b) referring to intercultural educational models that have proved to be successful with regard to some curricular reforms in EU countries; c) capitalizing the results of the researches based on analyzing the relations between multiple categories of determinations and students' social and school performances, as part of the cultural diversity context.

For these reasons, we have elaborated the research project *Development direction of the intercultural curriculum in Romania, from the perspective of the European education dimension*, which is under implementation as part of the project POSDRU/159/1.5/S/136077 "Romanian culture and European cultural models: research, timing, sustainability", whose beneficiary is the Romanian Academy.

The first approach of the reorganization process of the intercultural curriculum as part of the research project, is based on an audit analysis in order to emphasize the curricular areas of convergence and the incompatibilities with the European system of values, as far as the intercultural education is regarded. To this effect, the first specific goal of our project aims accomplishing a harmonization degree barometer of the intercultural competences' development level, through the national curriculum in Romania and those desirables as part of the European space. In order to accomplish this goal, we have applied a complex methodology consisting in: hermeneutic analyses of the specialty literature, analyses of the documents of educational policies, methods and tools in order to study subjects' opinions and to analyze educational needs and curricular preferences.

The questionnaire represents the basic investigation tool, and its data will be reinforced and detailed by focus-groups, individual interviews, participatory observations and biographical method. In order to achieve some preliminary information of the research and to pretest the questionnaire, we have applied a microresearch on a group of subjects having the characteristics of the sample as part of the project. From this perspective, the study *Development perspectives of the intercultural curriculum in Romania* represents a methodological research.

The study's goals are:

- 1) Studying the impact of the intercultural curriculum in Romania, analyzed from multiple points of view.
- 2) Developing and validating the investigation tools used in order to audit the intercultural curriculum.

While analyzing relevant data for the microresearch's goals, we have taken into consideration the following criteria:

- the perceptions regarding the adequacy of the intercultural curriculum in Romania to intercultural education's principles and values;
- the methodological opinions referring to the development of the intercultural curriculum in Romania;
- the landmarks in elaborating and implementing programs of intercultural education;
- the possibility of developing methodological tools, which are meant to confirm and detail subjects' answers.

## 2. Paper theoretical foundation and related literature

Actually, the intercultural's comprehensive approach it is being capitalized, which emphasizes the proceeding aspect, of dialogue and interaction between persons and groups having different cultural references as part of the multicultural context, which is "a reality of existence as part of the same space and time horizon of some groups of individuals coming from or referring to multiple cultures, who manifest their specific characteristics in an isolated

manner, usually avoiding multiple levels contaminations (Rey, 1999). To this effect, the intercultural education aims “developing an education for all of us in order to recognize the differences that exist as part of the same society, and less (or at all) an education for different cultures” (Cucoș, 2002).

### **2.1. The anthropological foundation of the intercultural curriculum**

The anthropological perspective analyzes the human aspects of social, cultural, economical and educational phenomenons and processes, from a holistic point of view and through detailed, in-depth analyses. The intercultural education especially capitalizes the data of cultural and social anthropology, psychological anthropology, but also aspects belonging to physical anthropology, “especially regarding anatomy’s description and statement of the human body canon” (Bălăceanu-Stolnici, C., Glavce, C., Berescu, M., Boroșanu, A., 2010).

From the perspective of anthropological disciplines, as part of the researches regarding intercultural curriculum’s development, there can be studied the relations between multiple variables: physiological aging and social performances; biological characteristics and self esteem, as part of multicultural contexts; cultural identity and self esteem; cultural integration and school performances.

### **2.2. The sociological foundation of the intercultural curriculum**

The sociological paradigms capitalized as part of the curricula’s elaboration analyze students’ processes of socialization, through social, cultural and intercultural learning.

The functional paradigm promoted by Durkheim concentrates the analyses on social facts, allowing the reveal of some internalization and socialization methodologies as part of the cultural diversity context.

The symbolic interaction developed by Mead promotes communication as a principle of organizing society and conscience. To this effect, the methods and techniques of intercultural communication are being capitalized as means of cultural transmission with regard to the situations of cultural identity manifestation and the processes of cultural accommodation and cultural integration.

Applying the phenomenological and structural constructivism to the intercultural education it is accomplished by capitalizing individual and collective experiences with regard to situations of contact between cultures. The educational processes can’t be reduced to reproducing social and cultural models and values, being headed towards social construction and development of new social models as part of the multicultural context.

The ethno-methodology (Garfinkel) and cognitive sociology (Cicourel) approach the constructive theories given the following premise: “the normative compliance of conduct belonging to members of an organization it is *interactively* build through a concentrated effort in order to transform their daily actions into comprehensible actions for themselves and for others” (Stănciulescu, 1996, p. 140).

Another analysis of the intercultural curriculum’s social determinations refers to phenomenons analyzed from a psycho-sociological perspective, which can characterize aspects of the cultural context as part of which the school curriculum it is institutionalized: migration, prejudices, discrimination, racism, social exclusion, acculturation, social deviation, social uniformity, conflicts between groups.

### **2.3. The intercultural curriculum’s psychological foundation**

The intercultural psychology studies the relation between socio-cultural variables and different sides of the human personality, capitalized by developing curricular models adequate to a certain multicultural context and to individuals’ psycho-social characteristics. Epistemologically, the intercultural psychology is located between the traditional psychology and the cultural anthropology (Segall et al., 1999) and it is developed on interdisciplinary syntheses between: a) the traditional psychology’s absolutism, which operates with non-cultural factors while analyzing cultural groups, prevails a predominantly quantitative standard methodology and accomplishes criterial assessments; b) the intercultural anthropology’s relativism, which approaches cultural factors while explaining groups’ characteristics, uses qualitative research methods, but it does not accomplish comparative evaluations.

The intercultural psychology’s theoretical framework it is being developed on multiple types of interactions (Berry et al, 1992, apud Gavreliuc, 2011):

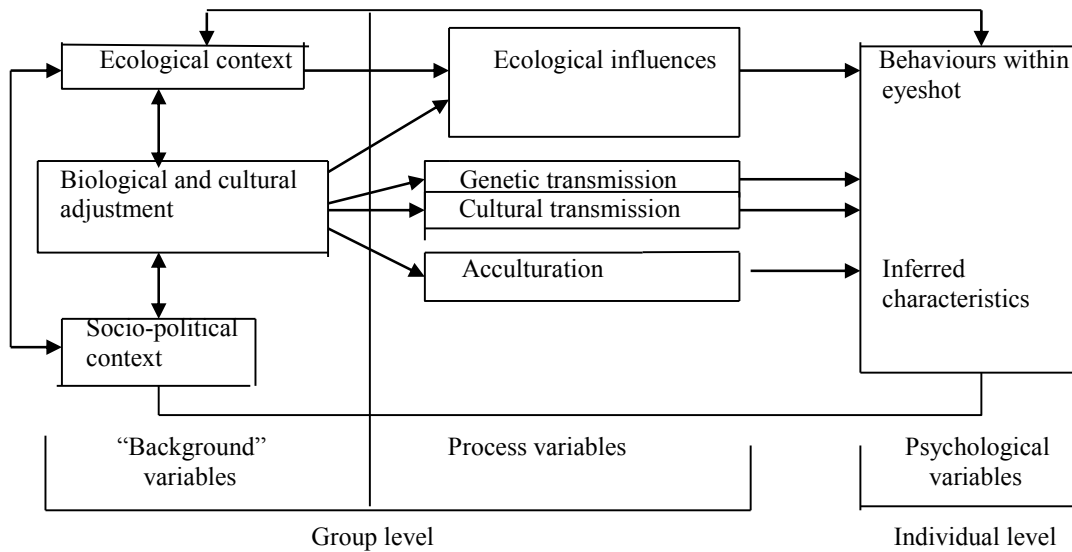


Fig. 1. Epistemological perspectives as part of the intercultural psychology (Gavreliuc, 2011, p.39)

#### 2.4. The intercultural curriculum's pedagogical foundation

The intercultural curriculum's pedagogical foundation is based on conceptual approaches as part of the analysis of intercultural curriculum and educational models, on which curricular constructions are developed.

As far as the European key competences are regarded, the intercultural competences represent the ensemble of knowledge, skills and attitudes that facilitate a proper social insert as part of cultural groups, intercultural dialogue, and social statement regarding the multicultural society. With respect to European Commission's key competences that underlie the curricula, the intercultural competences derive from: social competences and civic competences; learning how to learn; cultural awareness and expression.

In a broad sense, the intercultural curriculum represents a holistic educational project including the ensemble of educational processes and intercultural learning experiences, in formal, nonformal and informal contexts as part of the continuous education. In a narrow sense, the intercultural curriculum is represented by all educational documents, projects and programs that aim the development of individuals' intercultural competences and life skills, as part of the multicultural society.

*The curricular redefining model*, highly appreciated in United States of America and Great Britain, is based on (Banks, J.A., Banks, C., 1997): a) promoting new curricular paradigms in order to facilitate the intercultural learning; b) introducing cultural groups' values as part of the school curriculum; c) approaching intercultural contents from different perspectives and involving students in analyzing them.

*The social model of consolidating the minority groups' power*, highly appreciated as part of the curriculum in Holland and Belgium, promotes the intercultural school's development, within the meaning of a transformer approach of the curriculum (Wakling, 1980, Jeffcoate, 1976, apud Nedelcu, 2008).

*The living experience program*, promoted by Rulker (op cit) is based on the premise that the contents' readjustment is limited if not reinforced with programs in order to involve students in social actions. The model underlies the intercultural curriculum in European Northern countries, where social values are being integrated interdisciplinary systems and community educational programs.

The researches with respect to the Romanian intercultural curriculum reveal the following modalities in order to introduce the intercultural education's values as part of the area regarding the cultural and cumulative contributions model (Banks, J.A., Banks, C., 1997), which are the first levels of the curricular redefinition model: a) introducing socio-human disciplines for ethnic minorities; b) defining general competences as part of the socio-human disciplines, which aim developing cognitive abilities in order to analyze cultural and intercultural diversity, attitudes and empathy; c) introducing contents that approach multi-culture; d) readjusting didactic manuals and auxiliary subjects.

### 3. Methodology

Given the character of a methodological research, subjects' sampling and investigation tool's construction have been accomplished through the same techniques described as part of the research project *Directions of developing the intercultural curriculum, from the perspective of the European education dimension*. Thus, in order to gather the sample of subjects, we have used the mixed sampling methodology, focusing on the stratified randomization technique.

The sample of 120 subjects is structured on the following categories:

- 65 persons belonging to pre-University didactic staff of different specialities, equally distributed, between the socio-human field and other fields;
- 35 persons belonging to University didactic staff, having expertise as part of the socio-human field;
- 20 decisional factors belonging to pre-University;

The sex and age variables have caused the following composition of the sample: 60 % female subjects and 40 % male subjects; 22 -35 years (35%), 35-45 years (35 %), over 45 years (30%).

The pretesting questionnaire is structured on multiple subthemes corresponding to indicators in order to accomplish the first goal of the micro-research.

### 4. Results

Subjects' answers have been grouped on the criteria of the micro-research's first goal, which emphasize the impact of the intercultural curriculum. Based on subjects' answers, there have been systematized: a) variables positively appreciated by subjects (through answers situated at „to a large extent” and „to a very large extent” points or quantified with values 1, 2); b) variables negatively appreciated (by bringing together answers situated at „to a very small extent” or „at all” or quantified through the last two values); c) relevant aspects specified with respect to open answers items.

As part of the following tables, relevant variables are being indicated in order to be capitalized while implementing the research project (by indicating the cumulative percentage, related to “to a large extent” and „to a very large extent” degrees or related to values 1 and 2):

Table 1. Perceptions regarding the Romanian intercultural curriculum's adequacy to intercultural education's principles and values (items 4- 10)

Variables	Pre-University didactic staff	University didactic staff	Decisional factors
Conceptual approaches as part of the intercultural education analysis: - Intercultural education = education through and for cultural, social, ethnic, religious, physical and sexual diversity	58,46%	68,57%	55%
- Intercultural education = antiracist education	15,38%	5,71%	10%
Relevance of the national curriculum's intercultural dimension, in order to develop key competences: - Communication competences in one's mother tongue	73,84%	77,14%	80%
- Communication competences in foreign languages	69,23%	80 %	75%
- Social and civic competences	49,23%	34,28%	45%

- Mathematics, sciences and technologies basic competences	23,07%	8,57%	10%
- Digital competences	27,69%	8,57%	15%
- Entrepreneurial competences	29,23%	11,42%	20%
- Learning how to learn competence	31,81%	17,14%	15%
- Cultural awareness and expression competences	70,76%	25,71%	55%
Appreciating, through the intercultural curriculum, the following processes, attitudes and competences:			
- Enculturation	69,23%	54,28%	60%
- Acculturation	58,46%	48,57%	55%
- Cultural integration	73,84%	68,57%	75%
- Cultural identity	64,61%	51,42%	70%
- Intercultural empathy	30,76%	8,57%	20%
- Intercultural communication competences	50,76%	11,42%	40%
- Intercultural learning	46,15%	14,28%	35%
Educational models appreciated in elaborating Romanian intercultural curriculum:			
- Cultural contributions model	38,46%	42,85%	35%
- Cumulative model	43,07%	37,14%	40%
- Transformer model	12,30%	14,28%	15%
- Living experience model	7,69%	5,71%	10%

The significant differences registered are being reported to a high level specialty culture and expertise in curricular evaluation and development, provided by University didactic staff specialized in the socio-human field. Nevertheless, these differences do not influence the conclusions regarding the impact of the intercultural curriculum, because with respect to most of the variables, the differences have been insignificant and the answers are relevant for our research's purposes. On the other hand, by relating it to previous personal researches in the curriculum field, I have ascertained the evolution of pre-University didactic staff's curricular conceptions, especially through their adherence to European educational dimension and integrated curriculum.

Regarding the overall analysis of the research results, we consider that they confirm the empirical research' premises. Thus the subjects' adherence to the directions of the proposed curriculum development, the pertinent analyzes concerning the intercultural dimension of curriculum and the methodological views expressed may constitute a database to support the development of research tools useful in intercultural curriculum audit. Also, the information obtained can be exploited in shaping development directions of the Romanian intercultural curriculum, from the perspective of European educational dimension.

## 5. Discussion

The results regarding the impact of the intercultural curriculum have been reinforced and detailed by focus-groups meetings, with representatives of each category of subjects, and individual interviews, with University didactic staff having expertise in educational sciences. The results of the micro-research testify:

- the necessity and opportunity in order to resize the intercultural curriculum in the spirit of European educational social principles, values and models, and to capitalize the cultural heritage of national and local identity;
- appreciating another methodological conception in elaborating the intercultural curriculum, evolving from the cumulative models and cultural contributions to the transformer model and living experience;
- subjects' adherence to the extension of the intercultural curriculum, from the level of principles and values integrated into finalities and the level of contents (disciplines for ethnic minorities, thematic units that approach cultural integration) to the perspective of a multidimensional approach of the curriculum (Potolea, 2002); thus, as

well as for the intercultural dimension, the curricular development aims all component elements (goals, contents, training and evaluation strategies), all stages of the curricular process (planning, implementation, evaluation) and readjustments of curricular products;

- the questionnaire's relevance for the research necessary in order to accomplish a barometer of the harmonization degree of the intercultural competences developed through the Romanian curriculum and those desirable for European citizens;
- the possibility of developing the implementation methodology of the research project.

## 6. Conclusions

The analysis of the project's premises and the systemization of the micro-research's results contribute not only to clarifying some aspects regarding the research's methodology, but also to outlining an epistemological attitude in developing the Romanian intercultural curriculum: *the multidimensional approach of the curriculum's sociology paradigm, committed to accomplish the synchronous between cultural alteration and identity.*

The curriculum's sociology underlines the evolution from the curriculum's postmodern approach by displacing the focus from structural and rational approaches to analyzing the curricula by referring to cultural and multicultural contexts they are elaborated and applied within, and to a transactional curriculum, from a constructivist point of view (Gray, 1997). The curriculum's sociology paradigm facilitates the conversion into educational models of the social perspective of the "European synchronous and Romanian critical culture" (Bădescu, 2003), within the meaning of capitalizing cultural identities as part of the processes and phenomena specific to the intercultural education: enculturation, cultural integration, intercultural learning, transculture, intercultural management.

By capitalizing these perspectives and based on the preliminary results, we anticipate the development of the theoretical and methodological framework of the intercultural curriculum, and we foresee the development of the intercultural competences belonging to direct and indirect beneficiaries of the research (100 pupils attending middle school, pupils' parents, didactic staff, experts and decisional factors).

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