Multicultural education and the treatment of *others* in schoolbooks

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Abstract

This paper deals with issues that have to do with multicultural education in Macedonia and the challenges of its organization under conditions of democracy and complicated interethnic relations. Macedonia, as a multiethnic and multi-religious country, after the year 1991 tried to enrich the education of young generations with the new paradigms of the democratic society. One of those features is diversity, respectfulness of differences and inclusion of others in different processes. However, the question still remains unanswered: Should multicultural aspects remain only as a theoretical approach or should they become practice in our schools? Is it possible to have a real multicultural education in an increasing ethno-nationalist environment? Another issue in this paper is that the current majority-minority relations in our country tend to present multiculturalism as a trend in which minorities should learn, act and play by the rules of the majority. How much can be learnt about different cultures, ways of living, customs, traditions, cuisine, music and the culture in general from the schoolbooks used in the Macedonian society? The main clash is currently going on between the Macedonian community which is a majority and the Albanian community which is in fact the largest minority group in Macedonia, with 35% of the total number of pupils in primary schools. This kind of clash is often presented in books by insulting and offending the latter community. A multicultural society is supposed to be a society where diversities prevail in the positive context. The concept of multiculturalism in an academic environment represents the mosaic in which different linguistic, cultural, religious, racial and ethnic communities’ cohabitate next to one another. This is also accepted as a public policy in education as well as an educational philosophy and a way of living. With the help of statistical data we will try to analyze the actual reality and the future of the multicultural education in Macedonia.

Keywords: Words: Multiculture, Education, Macedonia, Others, School books;

1. Introduction

Nowadays there is little multiculturalism in the public social life in our country. The concept of multiculturalism is also subordinate to a mainly political review within the sphere of education. Often this educational philosophy resembles more to a theoretical rather than practical approach.

At the beginning of our discourse I want to present some dilemmas and tendencies which characterize the multicultural education. The first dilemma has to do with the theoretical aspect of the concept of multiculturalism in general and multicultural education in particular. The second issue relates to the practical aspect of the above-mentioned notion in a given place and at a given time, namely Macedonia in the 21st century. The third issue has to deal with textbooks themselves.

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Our approach in this context has to do with the multicultural learning models and the way how social diversities become a constitutive part of school life.

From what we mentioned above, we come to the question of how the mosaic of multicultural learning will be built in schools in Macedonia.

Both of these issues have to deal with the treatment of the others and the books that the Government publishes for the needs of a multicultural structure of pupils.

2. What is multicultural learning?

If we want to understand more clearly the concept of multiculturalism and its human aspect, we should watch back and analyze the case of Bounty Boat when the civilization to which we belong had to face other cultures and civilizations. Refers to Kottak the event curiously happened in 1789 when Bastille fell down; since then the human being became judicially – politically free. In this case, some sailors tempted by some beautiful young girls from an unknown civilization did not want to go back to the civilization which was some thousands of years more advanced than the first. They settled in Tahiti and began a new life; they started cohabitating in a completely different environment in terms of the economic and cultural background. At the same time, the host population accepted the sailors very nicely and openly and in a friendly way, though they were different and had completely different clothes, working tools, weapons and food – unknown to them.

For anthropologists and sociologists this kind of cultural communication represents an example of a mutual consensus and respect, although both communities were economically, socially and culturally completely different from one another. (Kottak, 1997)

Talking about the sociology of multicultural education in Macedonia means, dealing with the complexity of social conditions and social life; in general, in a setting full of economic, political, religious and cultural problems and contradictions.

During the era of socialism while we were in primary schools, we were told by our teachers that we could find multiculturalism in Australia – a distant country/continent in which no one of those with whom we communicated on daily bases had ever been before. In the globe that our geography teacher used to have, it seemed even further that we could imagine, and consequently it increased even more the distance of a real conception of this idea.

Today, multiculturalism is said to be a central topic in many societies and as such is present in lots of curricula, public policies in education, books and schoolbooks, debates and discussions, etc. According to Andrew Heywood (2008), multiculturalism is a descriptive and a normative term which in the first place talks about the cultural diversity which is a result of the existence of two or more groups within a society, whose convictions and practices cause the creation of different collective identities. Multiculturalism is closely related to the diversity of communities, which includes racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious differences that represent the stepping stones of human unity.

According to Keith Wilson (2008), a representative of the American multicultural education concept, multicultural education relates to lessons and learning designed for cultures of several races included in the American educational system. This concept of teaching and learning is based on the consensus among them, on the mutual respect and the affirmation of cultural diversity through several different societies that are composed of different groups and still cohabitate with one another in a peaceful way. The role of multicultural education in this respect is to enable the incorporation of positive interracial feelings and attitudes and an overwhelming atmosphere in class where differences and diversities will be respected.

3. The nature of intercultural education

According to James A. Banks, multicultural education means at least three things:
1. An idea or a concept
2. An educational reform or movement
3. A process.

Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students—regardless of their gender, social class, and ethnic racial or cultural characteristics—should have an equal opportunity to learn in school (Banks, 2008, 4).

Another challenge of the multicultural education is the fact that certain groups of students enjoy better overall studying and living conditions than the others (Banks, James & Banks McGee, Cherry, 2010; Erdem, 2010; Rastegarpour, 2011).

On the other hand, Charles Taylor (2005) qualifies multiculturalism as a policy of acceptance, i.e., cohabitation in diversity. Seen from the sociological and philosophical aspect, the primary role of education today is the recognition and acceptance of the importance of faith, values and ways of life in order to achieve understanding and the feeling of being valuable, both at an individual or collective level.

The existing models of social integration and inclusion in Macedonia where multicultural education can take place are of low functionality for the time being.

In the book “Skola za multikultura” published by the feminist organization Antiko, greater dedication and devotion is asked for in terms of legitimate needs, individual and collective diversity through inclusion—free of assimilation. Human beings are all different from one another and they can be identified in relation to gender, age, abilities, cultural, social, ethnic background, etc. (CIRA, 2008)

One of the crucial issues of multiculturalism is exactly the social cohesion of different groups in the society by creating preconditions and opportunities for these groups to enjoy their cultural identity.

4. The analysis of schoolbooks

We would all agree that what makes multiculturalism meaningful in education is diversity. Schools are knowledge spots and places where young generations get prepared to replace the old ones in their respective jobs, positions and profiles. Based on this, the perception of differences and cohabitation in a multicultural setting is very important.

The history schoolbook in Macedonia has incited many public debates as regards multiculturalism. Political representatives, analysts, educational workers, researchers, scholars of Albanian and Turkish background have constantly been expressing their dissatisfaction with regard to the content of the schoolbooks in Macedonia where issues of historic, cultural and ethno-genetic nature are treated as well as those that have to do with inter-community relations. These approaches and attitudes are a result of the overall social relations in Macedonia that refer to the social power scheme based on majority-minority relations.

For the needs of this paper, we will analyze two history schoolbooks of the 6th grades in both primary school models (eight and nine year primary school cycles).

The 6th grade book is written by two Macedonian and one Serb author. The book has 143 pages and all the pupils in Macedonia use it, i.e., Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Roma, etc. (it has been published with the decision of the Ministry of Education and Science). It has later been translated into the above-mentioned languages for the needs of pupils to get educated in their mother tongue. Pages from 8 to 20 deal with medieval age; 28 – 41 with the Balkans in the medieval age, the settling of Slavic people in the Balkans, the Bulgarian and the Serbian state, whereas only one single page is actually devoted to Albania.

Macedonia in the medieval age includes the following topics: the settling of Slavic people in the Balkans, the development of Slavic literacy and culture, the activity of Ss Climent and Naum, the Macedonian state, the Macedonian Church, uprisings of Macedonians—covering pages from 46 to 73.

The other chapters are as follows:

- The world and Europe in the developed and late medieval age
Balkans in the developed and late medieval age
- Macedonia in the developed and late medieval age
- Macedonia under the Ottoman rule.

There are 81 illustrations in the book where the Macedonian and Serbian church are shown; 8 illustrations deal with the Albanian and Turkish culture in Macedonia (we mention this because Macedonia is a secular country and the church and mosques are separated from the state according to Article 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia). It is also interesting to point out that there are 15 different illustrations that relate to Serbian church, history and culture under conditions when this community counts only 41 pupils attending school in this language.

The Grade 7 history book published with the decision of the Ministry of Education and Science in 2005 has been written by five authors of which four are Macedonians and one is Albanian. It is a little bit different from the 6th grade book. Facts are more balanced and the multinational character of Macedonia has actually preserved. In this book there are many lessons from which pupils can learn about others’ cultures; there are religious buildings, authors, first primers, cultural and natural heritage, artistic deeds, politicians, artists, customs, mores, habits, etc.

5. The debate on multicultural school books in Macedonia

There have been astringent debates among the public opinion in Macedonia not only about the technical errors that appear in the books but also about the contents, especially in terms of multicultural topics presented there, which creates multi-ethnic tensions. After the history book went for reviewing to the national council for schoolbooks, the same is going to happen with the books about music and figurative arts, which again do not reflect the multiethnic character of the country. The music book includes only Macedonian songs and composers and the figurative arts book, seen from the visual perspective, does not create the impression that it has been designed for all the pupils of this country, regardless of their ethnic and other backgrounds. It includes only the Cyrillic letters of the Macedonian alphabet.

Table 1. Number of pupils according to language of instruction, end of primary education (School year: 2008/2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupils Total</th>
<th>Macedonian Language</th>
<th>Albanian</th>
<th>Turkish</th>
<th>Serbian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27160</td>
<td>17360</td>
<td>9178</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source:http://www.mofk.gov.mk/novosti/

6. The presentation of others’ culture in education

The concept of the other is a purely multicultural concept. Simply said, the other is someone other than us. Michel Foucault (2006) uses this notion in his books in order to describe people who are excluded from the governing structures, those who have been sacrificed in the name of the liberal and humanist idea, such as women, mentally ill people, non-white people, the imprisoned, homosexuals, etc. The obese children are having the hardest times nowadays in their schools. It has generally been concluded that “the other” is very easily produced by isolated societies and communities. The apartheid, fascism, and socialism have developed special governmental policies for this purpose. Long-term educational policies have been created for purposes of exploiting, persecuting and extirpating the others.

Amin Maalouf (2009) describes the other as a necessity of the time, as fellows in this world and this civilization; he thinks that everyone since their childhood should devote themselves in learning and acquiring the cultural, religious, ethnic and other traditions of the others. This would be a very healthy start-up. Culture and education in the future should deal more seriously with this. Schools in Macedonia, as a multiethnic country, should devote themselves more in the accomplishment of this mission which is both necessary and humane for civic perspectives in our societies.

It is a fact that modern countries are increasingly directing their public policies towards centralization and they have, in fact, been quite often harsh and assimilating against the minorities. As a result of the juridical-political
affirmation of the human rights and freedoms, there have been tendencies of reducing the differences among the majority and minority communities living together. The actual and future social communities will be developing the concept of respecting the diversities and, as such, they will be considered as asset and cultural heritage. Multicultural education should be the leader in this respect.

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