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Multicultural Education in Arad County and Formation of Ethnic Identities

PHD THESIS

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General Presentation

Adolescence is characterized by the manifestation of extremes and by the attempt to define the self. The problem of constructing identity- ethnic and cultural- emerges at the same time. Yet at this age the individual operates with total abstract categories, with values which are not shaded. On one hand the individual wishes to comply with the requests of the environment when it is necessary for them to maintain a positive self image. These were the premises from which I started to outline the central idea of my research. Adolescence is an age that has always interested me and once the theme was established it came into focus again. Slowly, as a consequence of an important discussion about my research project, the interest emerged in establishing a relationship between adolescence – ethnic identity- schools with teaching in the languages of the minorities in Arad county- multicultural education.

At present, a lot is said about the dynamic transformation of ethnic identity under the influence of social changes that lead to a change in values and the deconstruction of stereotypes. I would like to place **the object** of my research into this very context, i. e. the formation of the ethnic identity of adolescents belonging to ethnic minorities correlated with linguistic self-identification and nuanced by the quest for religious identity. **The hypotheses of the research** have been the following: ethnic identity formation in adolescents belonging to minority groups is influenced , to a great extent, by the language in which they study (that of the majority or the minority) sustaining the choice of an identity by the family; linguistic identity is an important component of ethnic identity. Research has led to a significant nuancing of these hypotheses.

Thus I focussed on the topic of ethnic self- identification in the present social context. On the other hand, I have been interested in the role of multi- and intercultural education in establishing the equilibrium between conserving ethnic identity and tolerance, depending on the perception of the majority / minority of this type of education and in putting its objectives into practice.

This is a problem that has always aroused the interest of researchers, if we take into consideration the numerous studies that have apperared. Under these circumstances, there arises the problem of **the novelty** of my research.

Firstly, my thesis envisages the study of three ethnic minorities from Arad county: Hungarian, Slovak and German. I have chosen these ethnic minorities because in Arad county there are schools in which teaching is carried out in these languages. Also, I have chosen

schools which include teaching on high school level and where I was able to find the specific age range that I intended to study.

Usually, research is centered on the presentation of a single ethnic minority, but I have wished to achieve a far more encompassing image, adopting a holistic approach and vision through a comparative perspective. This way, the process of ethnic identification can be followed simultaneously with three ethnic minority groups reflecting the phenomenon in its complexity and reaching a higher degree of generalization. The majority of the theories and studies carried out in the field of the formation of ethnic and linguistic identity deals with minority groups made up of immigrant groups and the following one or two generations. But in the case of the ethnic minorities in Romania substantial modifications emerge. Thus, some of my results bring contradictory elements related to the existing research: f.i. regarding the conclusion that the choice of ethnic identity depending on the values of the majority or minority to which the individual belongs is annihilated by their ethnic self-identification with a third ethnicity which is weakly represented in the family and which is not sustained by linguistic identity.

Having in view the contextualization of the relation education- ethnic and linguistic self- identification, I have chosen to bring into limelight the new vision on education as well. My aim is to underline the relationship between the two terms of the relation in the light of changing and / or nuancing the outlook on pedagogical values. On another register, the necessity has arisen to clarify the concepts of multicultural education and intercultural education since each covers a different aspect of the dialogue between cultures. I have held the opinion that intercultural education which stresses the idea of existence and living together with the Other, as opposed to multicultural education which is interested in existence along the Other, can be achieved only if the understanding of ethnic and linguistic self-identification and the acceptance of the true relation between education and ethnic identity is a basic tenet.

Secondly, my opinion is that the **methodology** used is an important element in rendering a new perspective on modelling ethnic identity. Mostly, I applied qualitative methods, the method of the focus group and of narrative research sustained by quantitative data which had the role of preparing me for the research per se. This combination of methods is not frequently used in the study of the topic chosen by me.

Regarding the **applicative** value, the obtained results help to establish practical methods to develop ethnic tolerance. This is to say that the existing curriculums and educational strategies as well as those that are to be elaborated have to be guided by the

present psycho-social reality to avoid failure. Also, this information can be used by school councilors in their activity in schools where teaching is carried out in the language of ethnic minorities. Furthermore, programmes of continuous formation of teachers can be implemented leading to the valorification of these data. Last but not least, the results can be useful for the formation of positive ethnic identity and for the development of intercultural dialogue.

It would be useful to continue this research in about four-five years and to carry out an analysis which aims at underlining the elements of continuity, discontinuity, outlining the essence of the transformations along time.

Plan of the thesis

This thesis is made up of eight chapters. In the *Introduction* I put forward the theme and its relevance as well as the new elements that I brought to the research of the topic of forming ethnic identity during adolescence. Chapter I is entitled *The Past and Present of Education in Arad from the Perspective of Mono- and Pluriculturalism*. On one hand it consists of a synthetic presentation of the evolution of schools in Arad; it is divided into several sub- chapters that follow not only schools whose language of teaching is Romanian but also schools where teaching is carried out in the languages of the ethnic minorities. Emphasis has been laid on high school. On the other hand this chapter contains the analysis of the materialization of the objectives of multi- and intercultural education on county level in Arad. I will also reveal how the reality presented on the level of the discourse is mirrored on a factual level.

Chapter II- *Ethnic Groups and Ethnicity*- deals with conceptual delimitations and also discusses controversies related to theories of ethnicity, without claiming to exhaust the topic.

Chapter III - **The Problem of the Self, of Identity and Stereotypes** - tackles the presentation of the concept of the self and the analysis of the self –identification processes of the individual. There are several components in the process of constructing self-identity, but for me the important ones are: *The Self and Ethnic Identity, Linguistic Identity and Religious Identity*. I considered it to be relevant to bring into discussion *Stereotypes*, which undoubtedly play a part in the *formation of representation about the self and the other person*.

Chapter IV- *Adolescence* - focusses on the motive that made me decide to channel my attention on self-identity at this specific age. This is the time when human beings ,take possession of” and start being aware of the roles and statuses that define them.

Chapter V - *Intercultural Education in Multicultural Context. Anthropologic View on Education* – offers an anthropologic perspective on education and implicitly on its significance in completing the self but also in the knowledge and acceptance of alterity.

Chapter VI – *Methodology* - is a detailed analysis and presentation of the choice and application of methods, without forgetting about all the questions that have accompanied me along my research. It shows the way in which I chose to use the quantitative to define the qualitative.

Chapter VII- **Interpretation of the Research-** in which I present all the twenty-six interviews, underlining the essential elements in the life of the participants. It also contains the synthesized content of the interviews.

Interpretation. Synthesis

Interpretation of Questionnaire

The utilization of the methods elaborated by statistic analysis gave the opportunity to analyze the differences between political, social and civic value systems. The way in which the value systems are structured show the degree to which the opinions of young people in Arad are compatible with the common values expected from the members of the European Union. The questionnaire had in view following aspects: *Democratic Values, Free Association Regarding Romanian Society, Tolerance and Multiculturalism, Level of Information in Mass Media, Knowledge about Political Culture and Personal Data.*

Regarding the diagnosis of perception on European and social values of young people from the last grades of high school we took into consideration the characteristics of their age and the knowledge they were supposed to acquire up to that moment. Also, it is at that age that they construct their self-identity and self-image. At the same time there arises the problem of identity construction, among others that of ethnic and cultural identity. But at this age the individual operates with abstract total categories which are not nuanced. On the other hand, the individual strives to correspond to the requirements of the environment when it is necessary to sustain his positive self image, to reduce the cognitive dissonance that appears between the information about the self obtained from those around him (mirroring in the Others) and the information stemming from self-perception.

The first problem in view is the knowledge of democratic values among young people. On one hand, we have come to the conclusion that the sources of information are diverse (school, mass-media, family), on the other hand the fact has been revealed that the subjects know the notions that belong to the sphere of the requirements to define the personality of a European citizen. Thus, they grasp relatively clearly the specific of solidarity, assuming responsibility, social participation, care for fellow-beings, tolerance,

liberty of expression. Notwithstanding all these, the process of putting these values in hierarchical order, according to their importance, denotes some aspects which are not to be neglected. A first observation might refer to neglecting social participation, which is situated in the inferior echelon and thus considered by the subjects to be void of importance; this questions the fact that maximum importance was attributed to caring for fellow-beings which cannot be understood outside implication on social level through volunteering or other forms of social participation. Correlated with the importance granted to human solidarity and minimalization of tolerance we can reach the conclusion that these democratic values are perceived on a superficial level. The subjects „have heard” of these values, they perceive the importance granted to them by society, at least on a declarative level, but the conscience of these children is not prepared for wholly taking these concepts in.

The first set of requirements of the questionnaire showed the minimalization among the respondents of the importance granted to tolerance as a defining value of human personality; although the concept can be interpreted in a wider sense as the capacity to accept, to understand and to relate to others. Nevertheless, I think that the term is given a mistaken interpretation among young people which becomes obvious by the insufficient knowledge of the configurative meanings: tolerance is perceived as weakness, as the incapability to oppose a certain thing. This is one of the reasons for which „tolerance” as democratic value is to be found among the least important ones. The wrong perception or ignorance of this aspect is attested by another part of the questionnaire which had in view the way in which the participants are affected by prejudices corresponding to types of tolerance related to: nationality, ethnicity, religion, culture, politics, other sexual orientations, races. The contradicting answers prove that they don't know the terms of prejudice, stereotype/nationalism and xenophobia.

The next set of questions shows the superficial knowledge of other cultures even if they share the same territory with the Romanian one. Thus, for the subjects of Romanian ethnicity, the language, culture, cultural practices, customs and traditions of other ethnicities are not considered to be important and are not particularly respected. A phenomenon that is surely manifest is indifference which proves once again that we are not prepared to live *together with the others*, but in the best case scenario *beside the others*.

The democratic values that these young people appreciate -' equality, freedom of expression, of choice, devotion, the right to decisions without influencing others' - end up being in contradiction with the democratic values that they adopt f.i.'the right to impose your own view on others'. For them the verb 'to impose' does not equate with annulling the right of

the other person and this way the positive image of the self is not altered. Hence, every item of the interview is taken separately and the connection between them is not accomplished.

Interpretation of the Focus Group

By presenting in parallel the items of the standardized questionnaire and those of the focus group it can be noticed that they are the same. I applied this method to be able to verify through a qualitative method the information obtained through quantitative research. We can notice that on a declarative level they take stands for the idea of tolerance, but after analyzing 'how they state what they state' we reach the conclusion that they either do not have a good grip of the notion of tolerance or they are intolerant. And this contradiction is evident in the entire interview of the two discussed groups regarding the problem of tolerance, intolerance and that of prejudice as well. Along these lines, for example, they affirm that ethnic tolerance is important for them but they reject the Romany because they look at them as a group and are flawed by the stereotypes that exist in the community they live in without taking into consideration personal experience. Another situation that appears is that they reject the Hungarians; while giving examples from their own experience it was revealed that these were merely excuses meant to sustain their attitude that was formed under external influence or they chose to withhold the real motives: "I don't like Hungarians because they talk aloud in the tram"; they do not mention their opinion about those belonging to other minorities and who display the same behaviour in the means of public transport, f.i the Romany (those who can be recognized by their specific way of dressing and by their language)

Oscillating between tolerance and intolerance is not grasped on a personal level either. One subject states that they suffer because of intolerance " I speak differently, I'm Moldavian and some people regard me with reticence" and proves to be also intolerant " homosexuals are not even accepted in the Bible", although they state that they advocate tolerance and doing away with prejudice. Hence, adopting a tolerant attitude is annuled by being steeped in prejudice.

What I have mentioned related to enforcing the image of the self appears when they come with ready-made answers, that have been learned, but which in truth are not accepted. ("You must love your fellow-being") In this context the problem of one's own culture is even more subject to paradox and contradictions. The subjects state that it is important to respect your mother tongue, but then they reject this idea by saying that the

language of the E.U. should be only English. They become insecure when they think of the inhabitants of rural regions and they do not know how to interpret their situation in the case of “Europeanization”. Also, they agree with the fact that lifestyle is borrowed, we must learn from one another- I make reference to ethnic groups, but they vehemently reject a lifestyle that they do not like. They definitely reject having the latter around them.” Surely Arabs are not going to come to us wearing their headscarves...here we talk about Hungarians, Italians, Europeans”.

Interpretation of Narrative Research- “Life Story”-Type Interview

A. Lexical Identity

As a result of the analysis I found that the following situations emerge (only participants are taken into consideration who belong to national minorities or come from mixed families) regarding the connection between mother tongue- language of schooling- ethnic identity:

- The native language is regarded as an element which ensures the preserving of ethnic identity and it is the medium of education
- The native language is regarded as an element which ensures preserving ethnic identity and it is not the medium of education (the medium of education is Romanian)
- The medium of education (German) is not the native language/ it is not used within the family and it is not an important element in defining ethnic identity
- The medium of education (the Slovak language) is used in the family only in relation to one parent and it is not an important element in defining national identity

When lexical identity is felt to be an important component in defining the self and when it is in a strong relationship with ethnic identity it leads to an interest in preserving the mother tongue, in case it is different from Romanian.

A different situation is that of a balanced bilingualism and trilingualism which on its turn influences ethnic self- identification. The individual considers that every acquired language, in the family or educational environment, defines them - which leads to them having a mixed ethnic identity

Consequently, in the majority of the cases, self-affirmation of ethnic identity is founded on lexical identity but we must not neglect the correspondence between identity expression and socio-psychological factors associated with language. We can notice the relationship between the ethnolinguistic status, identity expression, medium of instruction and socio-psychological factors of linguistic behaviour. Thus, the choice of the spoken language within the family, of the medium of instruction is not related solely to the ethnolinguistic status of the participants in the study.

B. Religious Identity

The other line of study is represented by ethics and religion, which have the role of exemplifying for young people the specific differences that exist between the principles governing the lives of all members of society- principles that can be understood and respected by each one of us- and some worthy doctrines-whose mystery is accepted as valid only by some members of the society

Following the qualitative interview applying the perspective of categories of content I focused, as I have stated before, on beliefs, values, customs and religious practices of the young people and their families. I determined the religion to which they adhere on a declarative level and combined it with the interpretation of information obtained through narrative research. The category “ indecisive” has been noticed which came into being owing to the period of a quest for a religious dogma that is to correspond to the moral values that young people consider defining them. Also, they tend to wish to distinguish themselves from others on the basis of their indecision, expecting to be marginalized.

Thus the functioning stereotypes become obvious: marginalization of those who do not adhere to a religious system or of those who adhere to a minority religious system exposed to prejudices. I also wanted to analyse the reason for which they chose to declare themselves adepts of a religious cult. I identified two principal motives:inherent religious convictions and extrinsic motivation based on the family model (especially that of the grandparents). Approximately 50% of the participants have not interiorized their religious beliefs and values; these appeared as a result of the family impact and the wish to preserve the positive image of the self , not wanting to be marginalized.

It has been revealed that young people are unsure about religious tolerance and that a series of stereotypes and prejudices are active regarding the representatives of minority religious cults, especially the neo -protestant ones.

Generally, modern people seem to have lost their core of values, which entails the fact that it is impossible to find stability in a valid system that can save them from existential chaos. At present humans seem to lack a transcendental basis in their lives. For this reason we cannot speak about a great difference between the religious and non-religious person. Besides this, the urban environment contributes to a great deal to the loss of sensibility of contemporary humans. Consequently religion has the role to serve as a counterpart to existential void, chaos and implicitly to the axiological one.

As to religious education it can be carried out in the family, church or school. This type of education is not only the privilege of the school or the church; besides dogmas, religious education contributes to building general culture and enriching the knowledge about the history of religions. From those stated before, it is clear that it is necessary that the people responsible for religious education in school should have basic knowledge of psychology and pedagogy because the religion lesson in school is perceived as a sermon.

The elements that form religious identity are present in the family environment either as a presence or an absence. Young people ask themselves questions related to the religious sentiment more frequently than focalizing on linguistic or ethnic identity, this holds good both for the majority and the minority. Often, these questions aim at finding a connection with divinity outside the Christian church which they reject because of its dogmas. Consequently, many of those interviewed stated that they were going through “a period of religious quest and self-definition.” But we must not deny the existence of a category of young people for whom religious identity is of no importance and the relation to divinity and religion is void of essence and importance.

C. Ethnic Identity

The ethnic identity of young people belonging to ethnic minorities is constructed through relating to *alterity*, by identifying the attributes that make them different from the majority. One can notice a strong relation to linguistic identity because the Romanian language is considered to be a non-native language that is difficult to learn. This is the reason why they avoid relating to the Other who is a native speaker of Romanian.

Among those who declare that they belong to an ethnic minority there is a category for whom ethnic self-identification is not relevant. Generally, in the families in which one parent is not present in educating the child, on a real or symbolic plane, we can notice that the constitutive elements of ethnic identity come from the other parent. In extreme situations children can hide from their parents the ethnic identity that they assume, they

declare that they belong to the majority and not the minority as the parents expect. Also, even the family encourages the new generation to choose the symbolic ethnic identity and integration into the group of ethnic majority. In these families the parents either do not consider ethnic identity to be important or they do not show interest in preserving ethnic attributes and handing them down to the next generations. The major loss that they experience is not acquiring the language of an ethnic minority, but only in terms of lack of interpersonal communication.

Those Hungarian and Slovak young people, for who ethnic identity is relevant and for who it constitutes an essential component of self-identity, think that ethnicity is a legacy that has to be respected and preserved. For Hungarian young people the problem of ethnic identity and its role is enhanced by the problem of communication in the *language of the majority*. Insecurity makes them bond to their own group more strongly.

Dealing with the problem of linguistic and religious identity I highlighted defining elements of ethnic identity.

In conclusion, our study does not aim at exhaustively interpreting data but at achieving a connection between the information collected through the methods previously mentioned, all united by the prevailing idea of the self-image constructing process.

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KEYWORDS

- **Mono-and Pluriculturalism**
- **Ethnic Identity**
- **Linguistic Identity**
- **Religious Identity**
- **Ethnic Group**
- **Ethnicity**
- **Adolescence**
- **Intercultural / Multicultural Education**
- **« Life- Story » -Type Interview**
- **Questionnaire**
- **Focus- Group**

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