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THE IMPACT OF CULTURE AND LOCAL CUSTOMS ON THE PROCESS OF UPBRINGING AND EDUCATION IN REMOTE ISLANDS OF THE WORLD

Summary: *The protagonists of the text titled “The Impact of Culture and Local Customs on the Process of Upbringing and Education in Remote Islands of the World” are children inhabiting islands in various parts of our planet. They are able, creative, full of ideas and energy pupils living on the islands scattered on both sides of the equator. Despite many differences among them, such as the climate, culture, language, skin colour, customs, time zones, or the surrounding flora and fauna, they do have a lot in common: young age and growing up in the environment full of tradition, rites and customs.*

The text is therefore an attempt to analyse the influence of the environment and national or tribal culture on the process of education of the young generation. For many pupils from the places mentioned in the article the only school they know is their own family house in which they remain because of local customs and religious beliefs. Sometimes the reasons for giving up education are also: the lack of financial means to pay the fee, the necessity to work for a living even by very young children or the distance to the school building which is too far away. Sometimes the continuation of the education process is prevented by premature pregnancy of merely teenage girls or the need for boys to gain skills necessary for tribal initiation.

1. Theoretical Part – the Multifaceted Concept of Culture and Multiculturalism

In the process of transformations taking place throughout the last decades in different parts of the world, something unexpected and surprising has happened. Not only has the increasing globalization not managed to stop the efforts to maintain tradition and cultural identity, but it has strengthened them even more. Similarly, the unification in the form of socio-technical evolution has not worked. While it has admittedly resulted in a very dynamic development of science and technology, it has preserved the distinctiveness of languages as well as local conditions and traditions. Irrespective of the level and technological progress in different cultures and in different regions of our planet, the actions to highlight the diversity of customs, culture, rituals and beliefs are still eagerly very clearly accentuated.

These efforts are also undertaken, apart from family and peer groups, in the educational environment, i. e. at school. Such a perspective, which strengthens traditions and cultural heritage, sets the whole education innovative challenges and additional responsibilities, especially multicultural education. They mainly concern the acquisition of completely new competencies as well as the improvement of the ones already possessed by both teachers and students. These skills should above all improve the acceptance of diversity and increase tolerance to the broadly defined “otherness”. Such aspirations and expectations, in turn, relate mainly to developing, by both teachers and students, the skills to break stereotypes, overcome barriers and patterns of any kind.

As evidenced by research (Gilbert, Evans, 2004; Kozłowska, 2005), educators and teachers of various school subjects on different continents, including Europe, still do not have sufficient knowledge about how to introduce issues of multiculturalism into the content of their courses.

This is a serious problem, as the issues of cultural, moral and religious diversity often cause students’ allergic reactions, and in some cases even violence and aggression directed towards the pupils referred to as the “other”. The starting point for taking action in this area might be the implementation of programs adjusted to the local needs of schools of the particular region, country and continent, and even before that, an attempt at approaching the concept of multiculturalism in a definitional way. It is most often referred to as a system of neighboring cultures that began to infiltrate one another (Kempny, 1997). It should be noted, however, that multiculturalism is a relatively new concept and is not always understood and defined in a similar way in different countries or cultures. In the Western Europe countries multiculturalism is discussed mainly in the context of the legal status of minorities or immigrants, who very often

represent different cultural circles.

In other parts of the world, especially in the countries where immigration has been a tradition, such as Canada, the United States and Australia, the main discussion on the topic of multiculturalism revolves around the issue of how to create a multi-ethnic state in which everyone will feel a fully-fledged citizen.

Any narrowing of the definition of multiculturalism is very dangerous since it ignores the chief areas in which a variety of customs and the system of values disclose. Participants of culture, coming into various interactions, refer to different rituals, religions, and sometimes to diverse ideologies. This situation, though inevitable and extremely characteristic of modern societies, not only enriches one's knowledge about different cultures but, unfortunately, it is also a very serious conflict factor. Therefore, culture and, together with it, customs and rituals often become a major source of misunderstandings with the surrounding environment. These conflicts are often manifested by a different perception and assessment of the world, by distinctiveness of values, beliefs, norms, canons and customs, as well as by a diversity of traditions. Nevertheless, it is a conflict that can be successfully overcome through properly planned educational impact and tactful behavior of a teacher.

Another significant and important factor on the path to achieve this success is integration activities performed by school and non-school educational institutions, incorporating all educational environments in their programs. A chance to achieve effectiveness of cultural education can also be created by programs which allow fast and efficient recognition of the risks resulting from different cultures, races and religious diversity, norms and customs. Identifying threats in the right time is certainly a starting point in the search for opportunities to establish a dialogue. Therefore, crucial are the efforts undertaken to ensure that multiculturalism, which is slowly becoming a norm for us, is safe, i.e. when different groups live together in harmony, with due respect for one another, attempting to understand different values.

At the same time such a perspective unfolds a number of postulates and issues to incorporate into cultural education, both in the area of particular school subjects as well as during an implementation of a complex educational program comprising blocks of school subjects and comprehensive pedagogical plans of different degrees and at different levels of education. It is one of the essential steps of sensible multicultural education, that is the education helping not only to get to know and understand the "familiar" and the "alien", but the education creating the basis of tolerance, reasonable coexistence and interaction with others.

Researchers of the problem of multicultural education point out a number of additional tasks in this area. Kwiecinski (2000) draws attention to the need for

gradation of the aims of multicultural education. They are as follows: negation of the discriminated subgroups, tolerance, acceptance of diversity, defense of the right to be different, responsibility for change. According to Kwiatkowska (1999), on the other hand, education is to shape a person's self-awareness following the genesis of the human being, improving the ability to perceive other people in a sympathetic and respectful way, with their own history and a place in it. Śliwerski (1998), in turn, rightly notes that "cultural education should lead to a coexistence based on partnership and peace, without striving for harmony but for competent solving of conflicts appearing on the grounds of differences".

Due to the scope of the subject, it is not possible to present in this text, which only signals a problem of great importance, all the significant and interesting theories and ideas that make up the image of a teacher in the prism of multiculturalism. Therefore, in the final passage, closing the theoretical part, I would like to present only some of the concepts that make up a moderately complete picture of the ideas regarding teacher competencies in the area of cultural education. According to Redmond (Redmond, 1991) their foundation should consist of: communication compatibility and accuracy, adaptation to the variability, social integration ability, language skills and knowledge of both the cultures that communicate with each other and their customs. For Cui and Awa (Cui and Awa, 1992) amongst the most important competencies of an effective multicultural educator are: interpersonal skills, social interactions, cultural empathy, flexible personality and leadership skills. Recent studies (Kozłowska, 2008) increasingly point out that this list should be supplemented with such characteristics as: tolerance for ambiguity, cognitive flexibility, patience, enthusiasm and commitment as well as openness to new experiences and to other people. As necessary elements of educational activities in the field of multicultural education respondents also often name: empathy, distance to oneself, respect for others and a sense of humor.

The postulates mentioned by the authors explicitly refer to the already known, since 1976, scale referred to as "basic" (Ruben 1976), containing eight indispensable elements of pedagogical competencies, which are: a high level of respect for others, interactive attitude, focus on knowledge, empathy, task approach to roles, performing roles in relationships with others, interactive leadership and tolerance for ambiguity. The authors of the "basic" scale clearly emphasize that these skills are effective only in combination with executive competencies such as: knowledge of foreign languages, self-presentation and communication skills.

2. Practical Part – Cultural Education in Certain Parts of the World

During my research journeys, while analyzing systems of education, not only did I discover the knowledge of organizing the learning process, but also the information regarding the impact of customs and broadly defined culture of the region on education and training programs at schools on remote islands of the world. Below I present a few examples.

Madagascar

Less than 50 percent of children go to school there, and only about 20 percent of them finish it at the primary level. The other children do not turn up at school for several reasons. One of them, apart from the necessity to undertake paid work, is a considerable distance between home and school. Other reasons for absence from school are also: views and beliefs as well as customs and the mentality of parents and local community. Girls living there are in a particularly difficult situation. Because of their allegiance to tribal traditions and the fear of the fact that an educated girl may have serious problems with adjusting to the surroundings and finding a candidate for a husband, they often stay at home. The factors interfering with completing school education by those girls are not only the community's allegiance to their tradition, mental reasons or truancy. Premature pregnancies are another significant reason for that, even though girls are provided with the knowledge of this subject from the earliest years of primary school. However, if they become pregnant, they have no chance to continue their education. From that moment on they only look after children and perform a series of heavy household chores. Most primary schools that I observed in Madagascar are coeducational. Schools preparing students for taking up education at the secondary level, however, are frequently subdivided according to sex, which is yet another example illustrating their strong attachment to traditions and customs.



Picture 1

Kiribati

This archipelago of 21 inhabited islands scattered around the equator and belonging to Micronesia and Polynesia is filled with the atmosphere of local traditions and regional customs. The very fact that there is neither fresh water nor electrical power supply on the island determines the life of its inhabitants. Without access to television, the Internet or mobile phones, and without contacts with tourists, due to the lack of any regular connections by sea and by air, locals lead their lives cultivating their own traditions, without the influence of other cultures. One of the main activities of the inhabitants of this island, apart from obtaining drinking water and food, is collecting sea shells for adornment of their bodies and attire. The purposefully braided strings of beads emphasize their status in the group and leadership roles. The lack of electricity also determines the poor supply of teaching aids in the only school on the island. This school consists of a few almost identical cottages in a large meadow, where students learn various subjects at the primary level. Education at higher stages means the necessity to leave the island, which they decide to do extremely rarely. Students on the Kiribati island learn reading, writing, numeracy, the knowledge about the environment and the basics of English. The school program also includes a lot of physical education classes, emphasizing not only physical activity, but also the attachment to tradition. Students willingly sing local songs and perform ritual dances in especially designed costumes, plaited with narrow leaves of local palm trees.



Picture 2

Rangiroa

This tiny island in French Polynesia, in the Tuamotu archipelago to be more specific – except for the only primary school and a pearl farm, next to which a professional school of art was founded – has no cultural or educational institutions. Successive generations that live without electricity and the Internet

access preserve their tribal and art traditions, which include the ins and outs of the black pearl cultivation and ornamentation of shells, which constitute jewelry. The young learn the art of obtaining precious pearls as well as shell ornamentation by applying silhouettes of Polynesian gods with small scribes. Popular motifs that appear on the shells are also plants characteristic of this area and fragments of paintings by Gauguin, who spent a part of his life on the islands of French Polynesia. The school bears his name, and thus the artist's works become an excellent opportunity to explore the remote European culture and, at the same time, to seek connections with it.



Picture 3

Maldives

Almost all the inhabitants of that country, as many as 99 percent, are Islam followers, and the remaining one percent is shared among the followers of Buddhism and Hinduism. Thus, religion is the major determinant of morality on the island. Since the moment of their first menstruation, girls must wear a headdress. This allegiance to tradition can also be seen during school classes. Wearing head kerchiefs applies not only to female students of primary school higher grades; female teachers are obliged to wear traditional costumes as well.

However, the tradition visible in costumes seems to be somehow at odds with using the latest models of mobile phones by the inhabitants. The telephone is one of the most used items on the island. Many of the girls and women tend to own even more than one at a time, which is just another example of combining a very strong tradition in customs with a desire for technological novelties.



Picture 4

Java

The rhythm both of the day and education is set by the belief in ghosts there. It is so pervasive that in the seventies of the previous century the local university students even organized an exhibition presenting letters written by spirits, to prove that ghosts really existed. However, the exhibition was soon closed, because, even without it, no one on the island of Java ever doubted that spirits were present everywhere there.

Nowadays, the contents of many school programs include topics connected with the tradition of fabric decoration using the painting technique called “batik”, the idea of which is to apply wax to the fabric and then dye it. This technique is widespread mainly in Indonesia, and most of all in Java. In 2009 batik found its place on The List of Intangible Heritage of Humanity, and since then the schools there have implemented programs to cultivate this tradition even more dynamically. Java is also famous of children festivals of the cultures of its region, during which besides traditional costumes students present small theatrical forms.



Picture 5

Bali

The residents of Bali cultivate their beliefs in sacred animals, plants, various phenomena and objects. Even before children start attending primary school, they learn from their parents about the good and bad spirits that inhabit their family homes. On the Bali island no one leaves the house where they were born. The reason for that is simple – you cannot move the spirits of your ancestors to any other house, and according to the religion you cannot live without the spirits. For the same reason houses are not sold, as it would mean selling them together with the spirits of the forefathers. Therefore, as long as the financial status permits, houses are expanded and in this way multigenerational households come into being. The rule to stay in the family house, however, applies only to men, while women move to their husband’s family home after getting married.

Access to the education at state schools is greatly limited on the island. Only the first and the second child in a family is entitled to free education, the education of other children has to be paid for, even in primary school. The result of the situation is that a significant number of children stay at their homes, which are filled with customs, beliefs, and local rites.

Sometimes children go to small manufactories where they work and at the same time gain qualifications which will enable them to perform particular jobs in the future. These professions often refer to the tradition of weaving, ornamentation on a variety of materials and to local rituals.



Picture 6

Mauritius

The island is a unique and extremely consistent mosaic of races and cultures. Its diversity, both ethnic and cultural at the same time, is quite unusual on this small strip of land, which is only 60 km long and 40 km wide, also because of an enormous unanimity among the inhabitants of the island. This captivating palette of races and cultures is formed by the descendants of slaves from Africa and Asia and plantation owners from Europe, as well as the contemporary Hindus, Chinese, Africans and, emerging from these mosaic marriages, Creole people. They have various origins, diverse religions, different customs, but also something that unites them and distinguishes from most places in the world. It is the culture of co-existence of miscellaneous traditions, beliefs, faith and customs. Due to the multiculturalism of this society, every week there is some important religious holiday or ceremony associated with the tradition, such as Tamil walking on embers or Hindu body piercing as well as Catholic pilgrimages and Chinese dragon or snake parades. You can be also amazed by, standing almost next to each other every step of your way, Hindu and Tamil temples, Buddhist pagodas, lofty mosques, Catholic churches and chapels as well as houses of the followers of the strangest religions. The most surprising, however, is the fact that people of very different beliefs can not only live here together

in complete agreement, but also participate in national and religious holidays of other cultures. Such strong respect for other cultures is, among other things, to the merit of the obligatory intersubjective path regarding cross-cultural education at all levels of education at Mauritius schools. Its program comprises contents referring to all minority groups living on the island as well as ideas of tolerance towards the “otherness”.



Picture 7

Conclusion

Summarizing the presented facts, standpoints and views on the issues of cultural education, it should be emphasized that its tasks are complex, difficult and multi-faceted. Teachers on all the continents are expected to be knowledgeable not only in a particular subject and pedagogy, but also both in the culture and customs of their local region as well as in the rites of distant countries. Teachers should therefore be both reflective and creative professionals as well as sensitive and tolerant educators.

It turns out that for Europe, despite its well-functioning education systems in various subjects of education, there is still a lot to do in the field of cultural education. It requires continuous development and improving the ability to cooperate with others, as well as fair evaluation of both teachers' own work and students' achievements. Teachers fulfilling the requirements of multicultural education are also expected to constantly develop their competencies in both dialogue and active listening, which will enable them to achieve a balance between adopting common standards and curbing the existing differences. The competence indispensable in the execution of the tasks and challenges in the area of cultural education is also a continual teacher self-development as well as enriching their skills and knowledge regarding diverse religions and cultures. There is another extremely important matter in the area of multicultural competencies: it is a good knowledge not only of foreign languages, but also of miscellaneous traditions, rituals, religions and cultures.

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UTJECAJ KULTURE I LOKALNIH OBIČAJA NA PROCES ODGOJA I OBRAZOVANJA NA DALEKIM OTOCIMA SVIJETA

Sažetak: *Protagonisti su teksta "Utjecaj kulture i lokalnih običaja na proces odgoja i obrazovanja na dalekim otocima svijeta" djeca koja žive na otocima na različitim krajevima svijeta. Učenice i učenici koji na njima žive sposobni su, kreativni, puni ideja i energije. Usprkos različitim klimama, kulturi, jeziku, boji kože, vremenskim zonama, čak i biljnom i životinjskom svijetu koji ih okružuje, imaju puno zajedničkog: mladost i odrastanje u okruženju tradicije, obreda i običaja.*

U članku se analizira utjecaj okoline i nacionalne ili plemenske kulture na obrazovni proces mladih. Jedina je škola za mnoge učenice i učenike iz mjesta spomenutih u članku njihova kuća, u kojoj ostaju zbog lokalnih običaja i religijskih uvjerenja. U nekim su slučajevima razlozi odustajanja od školovanja manjak financijskih sredstava, potreba za zarađivanjem za život (čak i kod male djece) i život na znatnoj udaljenosti od škole. Obrazovni se proces nekad prekida i zbog tinejdžerskih trudnoća, kao i potrebe dječaka za usvajanjem vještina nužnih za plemensku inicijaciju.