

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING BY INFORMAL EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

Intercultural education, one of the „new branches” of alternative education, is absolutely important for seeding tolerance, anti-xenophobia and esteem for other culture in the minds of people. In this paper are mentioned intercultural aspects of learning people by informal education. Romanian media play a huge role in intercultural education of regular people. For this reason we choose a case study about the impact of supplement „Plus” – of „The Arad Observer” newspaper – in the minds of people from Arad (city and county), showing historical and cultural aspects of ethnic and religious minorities. Having the confession of readers of this intercultural supplement our conclusions are that in this case there was an important and real impact in intercultural learning. In the mean time, we are absolutely sure that intercultural learning must be integrated in formal, non-formal and informal education.

Key words: intercultural education, learning, tolerance.,

„The sine qua non condition for being accepted is to be an acceptant”
(Micheline Rey)

*Paraphrasing, we can say
„For being accepted in this world you must be an acceptant
of education”.*

As we know, the human personality is built with the contribution of heredity, environment and education. Among these factors, a huge impact has education.

Education is required to answer the changes of the real world. But education – especially the formal type – cannot answer so quickly because institutions, teachers, trainers, experts, need time for judging, applying, validating, recognizing, promoting and providing such kind of social offer.

In everyday life it has been observed that informal education is much faster, much adaptable to the changing world, than other forms of education.

In Romania this kind of education is accomplished through:

- radio and TV transmissions,
- articles of newspapers, journals and reviews,

- listening to and watching audio and video tapes, CDs or DVDs
- watching movies,
- participating in cultural festivals,
- singing in chorus,
- visiting museums and exhibitions,
- getting information in libraries,
- participating in sports events,
- cooking traditional food
- participating in local, regional, national and international meetings, workshops, seminars, conferences etc.

Important parts of informal education are education by mass media.

The environment in which we live exposes the human being to mass media messages. These exposures influence the patterns of thinking.

The tools of new communication build new forms of language, different from the civilization of the printed word.

According to the Chaumont Declaration (1993), the objectives of education by mass media should be:

- to train the people to live and work like autonomous citizens, in a society strongly influenced by systems of information and communication;
- to stimulate the interest of the people in analyzing and thinking about relationships between reality and its representation in mass media;
- to develop the people's critical thinking concerning these relationships;
- to develop the people's ability to express their thoughts by means of sounds and images;
- to determine people to go beyond the pleasures of consuming information and to appreciate the cultural and aesthetic dimensions;
- to train people for co-operation not for competition.

How can people learn by informal education?

How can people teach by such means of informal education?

What impact and contribution have in the minds of the citizens the watching of cultural transmission for minorities on TV, the listening to a debate on minority rights or culture on the radio, the reading in the newspaper of facts, habits, traditions, and customs of a group or other belonging to a minority?

Can a case study offer us relevant answers to these questions?

We propose a case study concerning the impact of the supplement entitled „Plus” – of „Observator aradean” („The Arad Observer”) newspaper – on minority and majority population of Arad City (172,827 inhabitants) and Arad County (461,7-91 inhabitants).

Questions for reporters:

- What goals did you have for publishing the „Plus” supplement?
- Which was the target group?
- How can you characterize the target group?

- What were the methods used for presentations of the materials to attract the readers?
- What was the frequency of publication?
- How could you evaluate the impact of the materials on readers' attitude?
- Specify any other details!

Questions to readers:

- Do you read the supplements „Plus”?
- What do you think about your neighborhood and specially his culture, presents by „Observator aradean” newspaper in supplements „Plus”
- Have you changed your attitude, mentality after those articles or, in your culture there are values concerning recognition of the other culture?

Table 1. Number and percentage of significant ethnic minorities in Arad city and county

Ethnic type	Number/County	%	Number/City	%
Total population	461,791	100	172,827	100
Romanian	379,451	82.2	142,968	82.7
Hungarian	49,291	10.7	22,492	13
Germans	4,852	1.1	2,247	1.3
Slovakian	5,695	1.2	450	0.3
Serbian	1,217	0.3	605	0.4
Bulgarian	819	0.2	251	0.1
Roma	17.664	3.8	3,004	1.7

Table 2. Number and percentage of significant religious minorities in Arad city and county

Religion	Number/County	%	Number/City	%
Total population	461,791	100	172,827	100
Orthodox	337,746	73.1	125,595	72.7
Roman-Catholic	46,651	10.1	20,971	12.1
Greek-Catholic	4,973	1.1	1,834	1.1
Protestant (Calvin)	12,359	2.7	5,406	3.1
Neo-Protestant	51,467	11.11	16,190	9.4
Lutheran	4,653	0.5	689	0.4
Mosaic	224	0.1	169	-

The motivation of choosing this example was:

Being in Romania a lot of prejudices concerning the minorities, their language, their habits, customs and culture, it is desirable to present the example of the citizens of Arad city and county with their ethnic and religious diversity, with their wisdom to live together in this area using the articles of the supplement „Plus”.

The articles from the supplement „Plus” belong to a project entitled „The Multicultural Arad, a Pass-way to Europe”.

The goals of the project:

- to demonstrate the existence of a significant influence of minority culture on majority culture and the shaping of such habits and customs in the majority culture, which are proper to minority culture;
- to create a space of tolerance, a space of good -will, without prejudices and xenophobia.

The length of the project: October 15, 2003 – October 15, 2004

In each issue of the paper the target group was:

- seven ethnic minorities (Hungarian, German, Serbian, Bulgarian, Slovак, Roma, Jewish)
- one religion / confession (from Orthodox to Roman-Catholic, Greek-Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant (Calvin) and Neo-Protestants)

Since our „new society” is market-oriented it is advisable to be aware of the cultural values both of the majority and the minorities. The authors of the articles insisted on this aspect.

The intentions of the journalists were:

- to help the citizens of Arad city and county form a positive mentality;
- to train them in „The Local Spirit of Arad”, a spirit of understanding diversity, of esteem for each minority or majority culture, of living and working together for building a real and normal world;
- to present good and valuable ideas and people who are winners!
- to present, also, the conflict situations between people, generated by belonging to different ethnic or religious minority, in parallel with models of good understanding and examples of tolerant living together;
- to present some aspects of ordinary life of the minorities and the majority, from different geographical area of our county, offering the readers the chance to better understand their history, habits and customs and to know better the personalities of culture.

Another intention of the journalists was to encourage the young people to assume their ethnic identity in order to preserve and promote the cultural and spiritual values of minorities.

The supplement „Plus” was published to be „agora” or „forum” from which one can publish or learn, by writing and reading about the past and the present, with insistence on intra- and inter-ethnic culture or religion.

Periodicity of publication: monthly

Confessions of readers:

„Those data and information were waited for especially by the young generation of the Bulgarian community. From the pages of the „Plus” they found out about the way their ancestors arrived in the area of Arad.” – Petre Dupta – a Bulgarian ethnic, 65 years old

„We have signals even from Slovakia. Some of those who went away from here, read articles about our ethnic group with interest because a lot of materials contain information impossible to be transmitted by word of mouth.”- Paul Ondreisik – a Slovakian ethnic – 43 years old

„Before reading this multicultural paper I didn’t know that the first educational institution in Arad was a Hungarian one. Hypothetically, one of my ancestors contributed to raising a group of intellectuals in this City” – Emese Nagy – a Hungarian ethnic – 23 years old

„Not all the Serbians know that our ethnic minority gave a writer and newspaperman to Arad. Thanks to „Plus” paper, we know, black and white, that our ethnic minority contributed to the development of Arad.” – Dumitru Vasilovici – a Serbian ethnic – 57 years old

„As a member of the German community, I can say that this paper was one of the ways in which we could contact the other members of our minority, who live in

other localities. We are very curious to find out what novelty has been written about us so that we can transmit it further. It is for the first time that the Arad press has published such testimony about the history of our minority." - Stefan Lachmitt – a German ethnic – 38 years old

„We are very proud that at last we are taken into account. Perhaps by the help of this paper we will contribute to the integration of the members of the Roma ethnic group into society. What the Roma's Party of Arad hasn't been able to do, maybe this paper will accomplish." – Simion Stan – a Roma ethnic – 52 years old

”I liked the Holiday issue very much (the Christmas and Easter Holidays). Then I found out, what my Slovak neighbor cooked, what carols the German ethnics sing and what clothes the Jewish family from across the road put on." – Avram Dranita – a Romanian ethnic – 45 years old

Fig. 1 – One of the pages of „Plus” Supplement / The Arad Observer Newspaper / referring on the contribution of Serbian Orthodox Church to the development of Arad county.



Fig. 2 – Other page from „Plus”. A title is about the founder of one of the Arad Neo-Protestant Church, other about Minorities Festival and the last one about Serbian Culture’s Day.



Having those confessions, like conclusions, we hope that readers could understand better and better the huge influence of mass media, in fact informal education, on intercultural learning. Education by mass media or critical information could be very profitable for intercultural learning.

In this way people could learn more. They could also learn to work together better and better, even if one is Romanian, and the other is Hungarian, German or Jewish, for example! By working and living together, in the same area, people could contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of the region.

BUT!!!

Is it enough to set examples to people, to give them a „prefabricated” culture?

OR,

Is it more important to give them the instruments which enable them to act, to inter-act, to learn by doing and to have the responsibility of things and facts!

In order to train true people for the XXI century it is absolutely necessary to put into all forms of education: formal, non-formal and informal, Intercultural Education.

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