THE VISION OF PEDAGOGY OF PRIMARY AND PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION STUDENTS ON THE ROLE AND CURRENT SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION. CASE STUDY

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Abstract

More than ever, interconnections and interactions between people have increased; phenomena of acculturation have intensified, as have the exchange of values and cultural models, the dialog between cultures. Under these circumstances, we need intercultural education to create a favorable environment for peacefully living together, mutual respect, daily communication free of discriminatory prejudices. The study aims to reveal the vision of students preparing to become teachers in pre-primary and primary education, currently at the start of their initial training in intercultural education.

Keywords: Intercultural education, student, tolerance, initial training

1. INTRODUCTION

Even if globalization tends to create a unique context and puts face-to-face peoples, states, nations, cultures, civilizations with different lifestyles, values and different levels of development, it has not cancel cultural differences between these entities (Zait, 2002).

Cultural specificity is and will - probably - continue to be "a live painting through which world maintains color and strength to overcome difficulties" (Zait, 2002). Therefore, we need: A. to analyze cultural differences between the various states, nations, groups and individuals; this implies "infiltration into the area of cultural depths and highlighting, in this way, significant aspects that mark the peculiarities of one culture in relation to another or others, as a matter of principle and as a general rule, or linked to a specific issue or a specific, determined purpose" (Zait, 2002). We also need intercultural education, by which we would be able to invite people to dialog, openness, to peaceful cohabitation and mutual respect. In these circumstances, it is important and useful to find out what is the meaning of this type of education in the vision of the teachers who will work in pre-primary and primary education. Thus, we could detach theoretical conclusions and practical solutions designed to produce a better understanding and to endow them with a vision, with attitudes and methods favorable to intercultural education.

2. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the research was to disclose the meaning given to the intercultural dimension of contemporary education in the context of intensifying economic-financial globalization and cross-border mobility by students in Pedagogy of Pre-primary and Primary Education, Faculty of Letters and Sciences of the Petroleum Gas University in Ploiesti, at the beginning of their initial training as teachers. Also, following results obtained and (momentary) conclusions, we set out to formulate and suggest a possible concern of intercultural education which takes into account both the poor information of students in this subject matter, as well as their self-interests (as far as we were able to identify). In our research we focused on the following objectives: a. determining the rank given to intercultural education among other types of education (known in the literature as new educations) by students majoring in Primary School and Preschool Education (at the beginning of their initial training); b. determining the place and significance they attach to intercultural education in shaping new generations (whom they will one day work with) c. finding out issues, themes and interrogations regarding...
intercultural education that might become key points for students soon to be teachers in primary and preschool education.

The method consisted in the implementation of a questionnaire (with pre-coded answers) to 56 subjects, of whom 15 were already teaching (without specialized higher education studies), and the rest (41) without any experience behind the desk. The trial has been conducted at the beginning of April 2015.

### Table no. 1. The structure of the experimental sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With seniority in education</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without experience behind the desk</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **DATA AND RESULTS**

After the collection and processing of data, the following were revealed:

Table no. 2. Rank given by students to intercultural education within the system of other types of education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a.</th>
<th>b.</th>
<th>c.</th>
<th>d. Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Health education</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Communication technologies education</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Intercultural education</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Environmental education</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*I. Health education; II. Environmental education; III. Communication technologies education; IV. Intercultural education; b. I. Communication technologies education; II. Intercultural education; III. Health education; IV. Environmental education; c. I. Intercultural education; II. Health education; III. Environmental education; IV. Communication technologies education; d. I. Environmental education; II. Education for communication technologies; III. Intercultural education; IV. Health education.

Table no. 3. Subjects' opinion concerning the place and significance of intercultural education in training younger generations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a.</th>
<th>b.</th>
<th>c.</th>
<th>d.</th>
<th>e.</th>
<th>f.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Trade</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Concern of each individual for their own traditions, customs, values</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Concern of each individual for the traditions, habits, values of others</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Tolerance</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. The desire of each human group for the success of their own culture</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* a. Trade; b. Tourism; c. Concern of each individual for their own traditions, customs, values; d. Concern of each individual for the traditions, habits, values of others; e. Tolerance; f. The desire of each human group for the success of their own culture.

Table no. 4. Issues of intercultural education that would - especially - get subjects interested*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a.</th>
<th>b.</th>
<th>c.</th>
<th>d.</th>
<th>e.</th>
<th>f.</th>
<th>g.</th>
<th>h.</th>
<th>i. Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. European educational policies for the encouragement of intercultural spirit expansion</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Usefulness and effectiveness of intercultural education</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Objectives and principles of intercultural education</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Thoroughgoing study of world cultures</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>e. In-depth knowledge of oriental culture, the origins and its particularities</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f. In-depth knowledge of occidental culture, of its origins and particularities</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. The study of values</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. The ratio between national values and European values</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Bottlenecks in intercultural dialog</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* a. European educational policies for the encouragement of intercultural spirit expansion; b. Usefulness and effectiveness of intercultural education; c. Objectives and principles of intercultural education; d. Thoroughgoing study of world cultures; e. In-depth knowledge of oriental culture, the origins and its particularities; f. In-depth knowledge of occidental culture, of its origins and particularities; g. The study of values; h. The ratio between national values and European values; i. Bottlenecks in intercultural dialog

4. **COMMENTS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

1. Lately, there have been more and more dimensions and directions of education required by the - more or less extended - recent phenomena in society. In the opinion of many of those who are in charge of formal education, these should be included in the official training of young generations. Among them, the following were listed: health education, education for a rational-formative use of new technologies of communication, environmental education (relating to the protection and conservation of environment) and intercultural education.

In this increasingly supported project, according to data contained in table no. 2, approximately half the subjects (49%) is of the opinion that priority should be given to health education, followed by environmental education, education for the formative use of information and communication technologies and only in the end have they considered it necessary to add intercultural education. In short, approximately half has chosen intercultural education in the last place. It is clear that the 49% believe that this type of education does not constitute - yet - a matter of priority among the objectives of schools.

However, a quarter (25%) of the respondents believe that intercultural education should be in the attention of curriculum designers and of the people behind the desk, because the world in which we live and will live is a world of interactions between various cultural spaces, it is a world motivated by dialog and intercultural understanding, relying on an exchange in values, either material or spiritual.
Almost one fifth (21%) of the subjects chose to support this type of education ranked second, after the education in the formative use of information and communication technologies. We can assume that they consider a priority the training of younger generations for a careful use of new technologies, to avoid the risks and dangers to which they could expose as their use becomes more and more constraining. Only then could the issue of intercultural communication and cooperation be considered.

2. Another significant problem in the deeper understanding of the vision of subjects referring to intercultural education shall constitute its place and meaning in the formation and training of new generations of youth and adults.

Table number 3 shows that 41% of the respondents consider that this dimension of education can facilitate tolerance between people (coming from cultures, traditions and anthropologically diverse spaces). Next, tied at 20 %, two seemingly contradictory choices: some believe that intercultural education facilitates and emphasizes the concern of each individual for the traditions, customs and values of another; others, that intercultural education facilitates, enables the desire of each human group for the affirmation of his own culture. Another 18% of the respondents without experience in education consider that intercultural education makes it easier and emphasizes the concern of each individual for their own traditions, customs and values. Summing the percentages of the variants relating to concern - either of the individual, or of the group - for its own culture, we get 38% (20%+18%), i.e. a percentage very close to the 41% obtained from the variant with most choices (tolerance). It seems that we are dealing with approximately 2/5 of the respondents who believe that the significance of intercultural education in raising and training the new generation is that they be concerned (at the level of individuals and/or human groups) by their own traditions, customs and values. This experimental segment probably has in mind the fact that any intercultural training has as a starting point - in any situation - the concern for their own cultural roots and foundations, which, ultimately, give us grounds for shaping their personalities.

Note the fact (which might, at first glance, be very easy to ignore) that no subject responded to the idea that proposes the significance of intercultural education would be to facilitate trade. Therefore, they did not assign this type of education economic connotations, related to the exchange of goods.

3. We are talking about an extremely important and necessary area of education. To make it as useful for students as possible and, at the same time, more attractive, it is appropriate to know the issues that concern and interest them (in particular).

As a result of our research, it is clear that 21% of the subjects want to have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of world cultures, to know in more detail their merits, morphology and dynamics, they want to get into the fascinating areas of world cultures, regardless of continent, and a further 21% are interested to know more about possible bottlenecks in intercultural dialog. This last category of respondents concentrate on knowing and overcoming the different intercultural tensions which, unapproached in due time and not treated with appropriate methods and in appropriate contexts, may lead to conflicts with sometimes dramatic repercussions.

Next there are 18% which are/ would be interested in the usefulness and effectiveness of intercultural education. They want to find out the use of this type of education (either in their life or in their vocational training). It seems they are not very clear about why they need it, what it is useful to, what place would it take in their personal training and in shaping new generations (as those they are getting ready to work with). This category of subjects has poor knowledge about the opportunity to assert and affirm intercultural education in their lives, complete with its landmarks, components, and aims.

To the same category of subjects (less edified and familiar with this dimension of contemporary education) seem to also belong the 10% that are - mainly - interested in the objectives and principles of intercultural education. For them, it is about a (quasi)unknown territory of the training of younger generations in a society marked by an intense cross-border information exchange, labor mobility, inter-ethnic tension, the possibility of attending schools and a university in a country other than that of origin, etc. This segment of respondents want to find out, first, which are the essential targets, the conceptual and practical co-ordinates, on which intercultural education relies on.

In smaller percentages (less than 10 %) there are subjects interested in: • 9% in European educational policies relating to the expansion of intercultural spirit within its borders; 7% are interested in getting to know in more detail the origins and distinctive features of oriental culture ; • the same percentage (7%) of subjects want to study axiology; • 5% want to know more closely the ratio of national values and European values; • and only 2% want to know in more detail the origin and specificity of Western culture.

In short, it seems that we are dealing with a more pronounced interest of subjects at the beginning of their initial training as teachers in relation to the thoroughgoing study of world cultures and understanding of (and, possibly, solution to) blockages in intercultural dialog.
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For those really interested in a better, more peaceful world, intercultural education becomes - or may become - a central objective of their life and a useful cultural tool. From our point of view, long term and medium term (for as long as a human being, limited and fallible, might forecast in a relatively unpredictable and random world) implications of our research could be: a. future teachers will better understand that many of the problems of the contemporary world, and of the future world would find a solution if new generations were educated from an intercultural perspective; b. future teachers will get the clarification and understanding that they themselves need systematic training and a much clearer conceptual horizon in terms of the profound and complex issue of interculturality.

After processing the data obtained, we can pull the following possible conclusions and we can make the following recommendations:

- it is necessary to stress/ emphasize to the new generations of teachers the place and significance of intercultural education: with the knowledge of their cultural foundations we preserve respect for the cultural foundations of other individuals, groups, human communities;
- clarification, reasoned approach, analysis of meaning and place of intercultural education are needed for the students in this specialisation;
- intercultural education implies a very fine cultural endowment of the trainer, reaching the depths of world cultures, and not mere rhetorical formulas and conceptual clichés (circumscribed to dazzling and circumstantial ideologies), that do nothing more than formulate dry, empty, but persuasive principles. Intercultural education really means teaching culture, it is to penetrate deeper into the privacy of world cultures and to open students' fertile horizons of knowledge and axiological self-knowledge;
- there is a need for a systematic, well developed and attractive intercultural education course, which has to include, inter alia: intercultural education objectives; interculturalism history; fundamentals of humanity culture; fundamentals of Western culture; fundamentals of Oriental culture; Western culture and Eastern culture: meanings, directions, landmarks, confrontations; other cultures of the world; national culture, cultural identity, participation in cultural enrichment of the world; the values - grounds for dialog and consolidating relationships between people; interculturalism and the power ratios; mutual respect and cooperation; blockages in intercultural dialog (Delumeau, 1996; Ferguson, 2011; Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2012; Malherbe, 2012; Nakamura, 1997, Negulescu, 1984; Papadima, 2009; Sacalis-Calata, 2012; Said, 2001; Simu, 1984; Vianu, 1982).

6. REFERENCES

