



This paper is taken from

*Developing Identities in Europe:
Citizenship education and higher education
Proceedings of the second Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2000

Edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 3239

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- Only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- Multiple copies may be made only by
 - Members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
 - A official of the European Commission
 - A member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as

Gocsál, Á. (2000), Hungarian Students' perceptions of the Roma minority, in Ross, A. (ed) Developing Identities in Europe: Citizenship education and higher education. London: CiCe, pp 167 - 173

© CiCe 2000

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe Central Coordination Unit for both the organisation of the conference and this collection, and in particular Martin Sundram and Cass Mitchell-Riddle for seeing this book through revisions, layout and to press
- The University of North London, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of DGXXII for their support and encouragement

Hungarian students' perceptions of the Roma minority

Ákos Gocsál

Pécsi Tudományegyetem (Hungary)

Introduction

Public education in Hungary has changed substantially in the past fifteen years and still there is an energetic tendency towards further change. In 1985 (still in the communist period) an Education Act made it possible to introduce alternative curricula, and, after 1989/90, some schools typical of the pre-communist period were re-born (particularly the six and eight grade secondary schools, which offered a major alternative to the four year schools of secondary education). The market for textbooks has also extended considerably. However teacher education has been slow to react to these changes. A survey by Ballér (1993) demonstrated that most of the Hungarian institutes of teacher education still insist on teaching the traditional subjects (psychology, theory, history of education, didactics etc.). The advantage of this is that students will receive the most recent findings on the subject and an in-depth knowledge of these fields. However, relatively little room is left for an interdisciplinary approach and issues that require such an approach will suffer. A particular example of this is the issue of minorities. There is clearly little chance for success if, for example, a special programme for the integration or support of Roma pupils focuses purely on classroom activities. If there is no understanding or knowledge of the culture, history and values of the minority group, such a programme will most likely fail or, even worse, will 'prove' for representatives of the majority group that the minority students are not capable of learning and need to be directed to psychologists and other specialists of learning difficulties.

One might ask whose underachievement is this? There is a considerable gap between the value system, previous knowledge, attitudes and behavioural patterns of these pupils and those expected by the school. One symptom of this gap may be the failure in learning. However, this tension cannot be resolved by forcing minority students to adapt to expectations which are generally unusual for them, but only by the more appropriate training of teachers to prepare them for such situations. The main focus of this paper is to point out that there is a need to include a multi- and intercultural approach in teacher education (with the particular example of Hungarian students' knowledge related to the Roma minority), and also to briefly show some of the related initiatives that have taken place in Hungary.

Society is permanently reflecting about itself. In such an interdisciplinary field we can observe how such constant self-reflection itself evokes changes in society under certain conditions. Societal self-reflection occurs in several areas. Press, public opinion and politics demonstrate reflection at the society-level. Another level, which from our point of view is the most important, is reflection at the school level. In terms of policy, the national curriculum of a country reflects the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the ideal citizen of a country. On the other hand school, at the classroom level, reflects more particular issues. As Banks (1986) suggested, 'many of the problems that ethnic minority students experience in the schools reflect the problems in the wider society.'

How should we in education approach such issues? Educators need to understand and evaluate these phenomena: goals need to be set, and appropriate strategies need to be determined to handle them. Báthory (1992) constructed a flow-chart systematic model of education, in which the inputs were the goals and contents of education, and the expectations of the local society (the clients of the school) determined these goals. This dual nature of educational administration was recognised after the political changes of 1989/90 in Hungary and there is currently a tendency toward decentralisation in education. In the communist system the strictly centralised system prescribed exclusive curricula, and relatively little freedom was given to teachers and schools in choosing what and how to teach. In recent years a core curriculum has been introduced, and currently there are attempts to develop local curricula. Although there are serious debates concerning the new national curriculum, all agree that in future Hungarian education will be based on this dual approach. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, Báthory's previous model (published in 1985) suggests that only society is a determining factor of the goals and contents for education.

Under the communist system practically nothing was taught about the minorities of Hungary in schools. Hardly anything was written about them in the history textbooks. Though the era was marked by drilling into children the idea of friendship between the communist countries, respect for the Soviet Union, and the federation of workers, peasants and the 'advanced' intellectuals, students did not have the chance to learn about the different Roma groups, their languages and cultures. But it should not be forgotten that in the communist era, especially after 1961, there were serious attempts to improve the situation of the Roma, including their education (Förrey–Hegedüs, 1995). Although the communist government censored some sociological findings - for example, they tried to hide the fact that there were hopelessly poor people, the so called 'deep poor', as this was not in harmony with the idea of the social equality of the socialist system - there were an increasing number of researchers investigating the Roma. Réger's two papers (1974, 1978) are crucial, as they point to several important educational questions based on linguistic research. Her further investigations revealed differences between the patterns of socialisation of Roma and middle-class Hungarian families. Such results suggest the need for new and hopefully more effective educational programmes. Socialisation is the key issue for Roma children. Mollenhauer (1974) highlighted that 'certain practices of upbringing in the family forecast a school result, different from the average that could otherwise be expected.' The school results of Roma children were also investigated in the 1970s. Gulyás (1976) found that in the case of maths, Roma children were systematically weaker than middle-class pupils (children at 7 and 10 years old). However, he underlines that 'most of the students are unable to understand the exercises because of their poor reading skills, and due to this (or partly due to this) they are unable to solve them. This is rooted in their disadvantageous situation and language problems, and, obviously the lack of home learning'. This shows that poor school performance is not the result of mental capacity, but a result of social circumstances not supporting the efforts of the school. He also analysed the sociometric situation of Roma children within a group and discovered high levels of prejudice.

Many other examples of research could be quoted but these examples well represent the main conceptual elements that educators need to consider when dealing with minority children. Relations between the majority and minority groups, their communication, social-psychological phenomena occurring at societal and personal levels and

discrimination represent one dimension of the problem. Another dimension is the examination of differences in culture, values and history. These dimensions cannot be disregarded when minority issues are dealt with in school. It is not enough simply to rewrite the curricula. As Banks (1986) says, school reforms of this kind need to be based on 'the holistic paradigm, which conceptualises the school as an interrelated whole', implying that school, as a microculture, has its own 'norms, values, roles, status and goals like any other cultures'. These features also need to reflect the values of all the ethnic groups that are found in the school, in order to best handle the issue.

Who should do it?

This question refers to those educators who actually have to stand before the class. Several ideas have been developed to advance minority education in Hungary (such as the Programme for the Development of Minority Education, 1995). Most of these programmes are specialised for a particular minority group, and little is available for the average teacher who may experience a mixture of several cultures in the classroom. As mentioned earlier, the standard teacher training programmes currently do not usually include intercultural issues as a compulsory subject. A questionnaire survey based on the participation of 62 students of the University of Pécs demonstrates the urgent need to include such topics in future. The purpose of the questionnaire was to discover students' knowledge and opinion of the Roma, and to explore possible solutions with students.

Results of the survey

The questionnaire was completed by 62 students studying education (all intending to become teachers of various subjects). Thirty-eight students (61%) were from the Faculty of Humanities, 19 (31%) from the Faculty of Sciences and 5 (8%) came from the Arts Faculty. All the questions were open, allowing students to elaborate their ideas. This method allows free responses, but makes categorisation rather difficult.

The first group of questions referred to their own previous experiences with Roma individuals. Some 48 (77%) students said that they have, or had, at least one Roma person whom they met regularly (generally as a classmate or neighbour). Asked about their experiences or impressions, these were equally distributed between positive, negative or both (16-16-16). The 'positive' or 'both' answers almost all came from those who have regular contact with Roma people, and only 10 out of these 48 responses indicated negative experiences.

The second group of questions concerned students' knowledge about Roma peoples. They were asked if they had learned anything about the Roma in school: 39 (63%) said that they had not learned about Romas during their school years. The other 37% had, but they all except one had studied them in the university, mostly in optional courses. Another question sought to compare their knowledge of Roma and of American Indian groups. The students were asked to list as many Roma and Indian groups (tribes) as they knew. They were able to name significantly more Indian groups than Roma (2.51 vs. 1.61 on the average). There were more students who were unable to give any data on Roma groups (21 students, 33.9%) while 17 students (27%) failed to list any Indian groups. However, those who were able to give data listed at least two Roma groups each: usually the Beash and Vlah Romas, but many of the students also listed Musicians or Loam-cutter Romas, which answers were also acceptable. Answers that gave the 100-members Roma

Orchestra or the Roma families of Zámoly (referring to recent scandalous happenings in that village) were not accepted as correct. Of the Indian groups, the Apache and Sioux tribes were most frequently listed. Only four students could name four or more Roma groups, but six students were able to do this for Indian groups, and one student correctly listed seven Indian tribes. Students were probably better in naming Indian tribes because there are more Western films on television than Roma-related programmes although the number of Roma-related television programmes is increasing. One programme, ‘Roma Wedding’, has been repeated several times through popular demand. Also novels about the Wild West were particularly popular some time ago.

The next group of questions was about the languages that the Roma speak. Exactly half the students (31) named two languages, generally Beash and Lovari. Some students responded ‘Gypsy language’ and ‘Hungarian’ or ‘the language of the country where they live’. Ten students (16%) did not respond to this question, and 12 students (19%) gave one language, while 8 students (13%) gave three. The most difficult question asked students to list words in Hungarian that are borrowed from a Roma language. Thirty-five students (57%) were not able to list any words, 10 students (16%) gave one word and 9 (15%) listed two. This is interesting, because Hungarian slang has a number of words borrowed from Roma languages, and some of these words are used even in informal (non-slang) usage. These words are not necessarily swear words, but synonyms of man (‘chavo’), girl (‘tchai’), head (‘shero’), stupidity (‘dilino’). The fact that words are borrowed, however, is usually known by students (‘I know there are words but I cannot tell which’).

Differences between the upbringing of Roma and middle class Hungarian families were asked about. The majority of the students answering this question (28, 45%) believed that in Roma families less attention was paid to the child, 12 students (19%) did not respond and 10 (16%) claimed that there are differences in the moral norms of the two groups (Romas have earlier sexual experience, greater acceptance of stealing etc.). Many of these answers showed a stereotypical approach, or one based on little knowledge. Only two students gave the response that in Roma families children are treated as adults. Only a few indicated some other important facts, such as the larger Roma family size, or that there are very strong bonds between members of Roma families.

Asked to estimate the Roma population in Hungary, a variety of guesses were given. These ranged from 50,000 to 3,000,000 people, (that is, between 0.5 to 30 % of the population of Hungary): 24 students (38%) were unable to give any number or simply wrote ‘many’.

Figure 1

50.000 – 25,000	10	(16%)
300,000 – 650,000	10	(16%)
800,000 – 3,000,000	18	(29%)
No response / ‘Many’	24	(38%)

It is not possible to give an exact size of the Roma population. Ladányi and Szelényi (1997), comparing several research results on this issue, suggested a number around 400,000 – 500,000 (4-6% of the population of Hungary), so it is clear that almost 30% of the students gave exaggerated estimates.

The third group of questions asked students about their perception of Roma education. First, in an indirect question, we tried to discover how many of the students think that most Roma families have a lower standard of living because of their lower level of education. Thirteen students (22%) answered that this was so, often suggesting that without training they are unable to find jobs and maintain their families. Another 13 students said, stereotypically, that it was the Roma mentality that did not allow them a higher standard of living. However, 14 (23%) students indicated a high degree of prejudice about Romas achieving a higher living standard. The next question asked why only a very small proportion of Romas were studying in institutions of higher education. The most typical answers were: their social backgrounds do not make it possible (24 students, 38%), or they simply do not want to study there (22 students, 35%). Some students (7, 11%) mentioned the lack of previous education necessary for entering colleges or universities, or the fact that they drop out of earlier stages of education. Asked about solutions to such problems, students answered as follows: To the question 'what should the larger society do for the Roma?' 21 students (33%) answered that society should be more tolerant with them and 24% suggested that the society should support those Romas wanting to work or study. Some students said 'we should first of all know them' or 'we should solve the problems together with them', and 4 students said that nothing should be done at all. Only 4 students refused any kind of co-operative solution, saying that they should be segregated, left alone or 'educated the hard way'.

When students were asked what Roma should do to improve their situation, most students (23, 36%) said that they should change - not necessarily losing their culture or traditions, but accepting some of the values and behavioural patterns of middle-class society. Fifteen students (24%) suggested that since most of the Roma are unemployed they should try to find jobs or focus on studying. Very few students indicated assimilation as a solution and only a small minority felt that the Roma should be more tolerant of the majority society. Finally, in response to the question 'what should be the educational policy to improve the situation of Romas', the most frequent answers were the establishment of special schools or classes for them (13 students, 22%), adapting the educational system to meet their characteristics or providing better chances for education (12, 19%). Eight students (13%) suggested that Roma culture should be included in the school curricula or activities, while 7 students (11%) said that nothing should be done at all. Other suggestions included better training of teachers and that Roma teachers should be involved to a greater extent.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the results of the survey. Firstly that non-Roma students - who are future teachers - have very modest knowledge about Roma issues. Although most of them have had personal experiences of Roma from everyday life, they had not received any related information from the school that could have changed the formation of stereotypes and prejudices. The second main conclusion is that - despite this - most students are open to new solutions, would support the Roma in different ways and would like to learn more about them.

Roma studies in Hungarian institutes of higher education

The need for Roma studies in Hungarian institutes of higher education, especially those dealing with teacher education, has been officially recognised in recent years. A study by Kende (1998) summarised these efforts and found that by 1998 seven universities or colleges had started programmes of different kinds for students. These programmes

usually included Roma studies, social education, linguistics and child/family/youth protection. The number of institutions interested in such an approach is increasing.

The University of Pécs (one of these seven institutions) has a Roma Studies Seminar, which is a pre-departmental division. An MA programme is currently being accredited, the present programme only leading to a Specialisation Certificate. While any student of the University may enrol in this programme, it is especially recommended for students of social sciences, humanities and teacher education.

The Pécs Romology programme has six main blocks of courses:

Introductory courses (Roma society, Roma culture, social policies etc.)

Linguistics (Applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, language policy, bilingualism)

Language lessons (Lovari and Beash)

Social Psychology and Education (Multi- and intercultural education, Roma children in education, socialisation, attitudinal research related to minorities, research methodology etc.)

Other Social Science courses (Introduction to ethnography, legal issues, demography, cultural anthropology etc.)

Romology courses (History, ethnography, music of Roma, research seminar etc.)

Students of social policy, social work, ethnography and communication studies are mostly interested in this programme as a whole. However, the University system allows students to also take individual courses and these are accepted as 'courses of general education'. There are hundreds of students taking Romology courses in this way, including students of teacher education. This demonstrates the interest and demand for courses dealing with such issues.

Initiatives to include Roma studies in the curricula of universities are at an early stage in Hungary. However, it is believed that further development of these programmes, together with other innovations, will promote solutions to the problems still faced by many members of society.

References

- Ballér E. (1993/4) *Neveléstudomány és pedagógusképzés* (The Science of Education and Teacher Training) Budapest: Educatio
- Báthory, Z. (1992) *Tanulók, iskolák – különbségek* (Students, schools – differences) Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó
- Forray, R.K.–Hegedüs, A. (1995) Oktatáspolitikai változások a cigány gyerekek iskoláztatásában. (Changes of Educational Policy in the Schooling of Roma Children in Hungary) in *Iskolakultúra* 1995/24
- Gulyás S. (1976) *Cigánygyerekek hátrányai és esélyei*. (Disadvantages and Chances of Roma Children) Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó
- Kende, Á. (1998) Romológia a felsőoktatásban. (Romology in Higher Education) in *Iskolakultúra*, 1998/12
- Kisebbségi oktatásfejlesztési program*. (Program for the Development of Minority Education) Új Pedagógiai Szemle, 1995/6
- Ladányi, J.–Szelényi, I (1997) Ki a cigány? (Who is a Roma?) in *Kritika*, 1997/12
- Mollenhauer, K (1974) Szocializáció és iskolai eredmény. (Socialisation and School Results) in *Az iskola szociológiai problémái* [The Sociological Problems of School]. (Eds. Ferge Zs.–Háber J.) Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó

Réger, Z (1974) Kétnyelvű cigánygyerekek az iskoláskor elején. (Bilingual Roma Children at the Beginning of Schooling age) in *Valóság*, 1974/12

Réger, Z (1978) Cigányosztály 'vegyes' osztály – a tények tükrében. (Roma Class, 'Mixed Class' – Reflected by the Facts) in *Valóság*, 1978/8