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Cultural and civic identities in the context of civic education

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Multicultural education is becoming an integral part of civic education in developing Europe's increasingly integrated multicultural societies. The Czech Republic has no tradition of multicultural education: the system of education is monocultural, even though Czech society is multicultural. We try to create the concept of and the curriculum for multicultural education by comparing our own system with the experience of other countries and by analysing our educational tradition and social, cultural and political reality. Civic education should combine both an intra-cultural component, focusing on the 'home' cultural tradition and identity, and an extra-cultural aspect of developing multicultural competencies and abilities, tolerance, and co-existence between the cultures of the indigenous inhabitants and of immigrants.

Civic education pursues the goal of educating people for democratic citizenship. By definition, a citizen is an individual capable of independent and critical thought, with a stake in public welfare and who strives to act in a responsible way for the benefit of community. Three factors are key aspects of democratic citizenship:

1. recognition that an individual has a relationship with society: the individual takes an interest in public affairs and is aware of the intersections between public and private spheres;
2. an active approach, making the individual an active player, not a passive onlooker;
3. the exercise of autonomy and responsibility, i.e. the individual's ability to evaluate situations and make decisions with regard to their consequences (Civitas, 1991).

Civic education is not limited to providing a general basic orientation in social science or to incorporating knowledge from other disciplines. In the first place, it must be pupil-oriented if it is to help pupils develop individual qualities, form their social 'self', and find their own place in the world in relation to themselves and to others. Civic education can only educate citizens if it respects an individual approach and the citizen's right to take his/her own well-founded view.

Civic education is a process that includes, but is not limited to, political education. Its scope includes the obvious state-forming level, but also encompasses values, above all ethical ones (see Feber, Petrucijova, 1997: 111 – 120). Moral culture forms a part of man's general social dimension that manifests itself in interpersonal relations. Interpersonal and social empathy forms a basis for pro-social behaviour and contributes to better interpersonal relations, reducing the level of aggression and violence. Roberto Roche, for example, pays considerable attention to human dignity. He considers attributing dignity to children is one of the most powerful mechanisms for optimising education, because individuals with their own experience of dignity and a feeling of being loved are capable of respecting and loving others. The goal of a 'good' education is to develop in students the ability to select from diverse values those that are suitable for creating one's own value and priority systems through critical thinking and through determining one's relationship to the existing value systems.

Civic education pursues specific goals in terms of educating citizens. It not only provides a system of knowledge that an individual may need, but also explains how to stand up for

one's rights, meet citizens' responsibilities, protect and build up democratic values. Realising one's own social, cultural and historic identity forms an integral part of the process and is critical for capturing one's own 'self', and for acting independently while co-operating with other members of society. The primary goal of any education is to build up the pupil's ego-identity. The fact that the societies of today are increasingly multicultural raises the question of what is the relationship between civic and cultural identity and the multicultural democratic state.

According to Erikson, individual identity is derived from the implementation of an individual's social role and functions within the society. Changeable at an early age, one's role begins to settle through a conscious searching for and demonstration of diverse identity options during adolescence, and arrives at an integral self in maturity (1986: 17). Identity shapes itself, in the context of changing personal life and relationships with other people, to attain a well-structured personal integrity through self-identification and self-assessment by deciding what matters to one's life and suppressing what is non-essential.

Civil identity is connected with the degree to which the basic attributes of citizenship are realised by an individual (see the definition of citizenship above). Cultural identity is a part of ego-identity. Culture is much more than mere embellishment attached to human substance: it is also its fundamental condition. (Geertz, 2000: 59) As representatives of a culture, we latently share common contents of consciousness, codes that underlie our perception and interpretation of the world. We are not mere products of the codes of a specific culture, we are their creators in the first place. Attaining the stage of autonomy means that man builds his own identity actively and consciously, and presents and applies it in society. We need other cultures in order to identify our own; we need different people to identify ourselves. The responsibility to apply cultural identity is based on understanding other cultural identities, respecting them, and looking for ways to co-operate. Whatever the situation, we retain the cultural links we grow up with. These links help us find our way through intercultural situations, and deal more efficiently with them. Cultural identity is based mainly on the self-preserving effort and is supported both by internal self-awareness and declaration, and by external acceptance. Cultural identity arises from the awareness of and pride in a common, shared present and past.

Literature abounds with 'provocative' views of identity in the era of post-modernism and multiculturalism. A remarkable view of the post-modern identity issue is presented by Vattimo: "We still continue to be a culture of conflict whose identity consists in permanent self-reconstruction happening in the process of conflict. Post-modern man will no longer be obsessed with the identity issue and will cease to look at himself as a strong unit. This will enable him to create favourable conditions for developing an authentic citizenship that will no longer be based on violence" (2000: 224). According to Adler, the new type of multicultural person is one without roots in a single culture, a person capable of changing identities and personal qualities in order to be capable of inter-cultural acting and functioning.

Allen presents an opposite view. The self is for him a major cultural construct that is not transferable from one culture to another. Thus even a multicultural person, aware of her/his unique self, cannot be someone who hovers somewhere between the different cultures because his being different is based on the Euro-Atlantic perception of the self as an atomised, self-defining being. (1997: 3-26)

Vattimo's view cancels out the importance of an identity problem on either individual or social levels, and Allen's view is rooted in cultural agnosticism. It may be more helpful to agree that the post-modern times have made the identity problem much more complicated. Post-modern pluralism opens a space for liberty and innovation not seen before while also threatening integrity and entirety. "A relation to something different, which is of constitutive nature for any identity, is loosing firm ground," because the world today is characteristic of the "predominance of the occasional, predominance of images, predominance of the individual" (Augé, 1999: 63). Identity has become multi-stage, case-to-case, situational. The contemporary concept of identity is based on inclusivity (as opposed to the exclusive identity of earlier eras). Cultivating inclusive identity is becoming an integral part of both civic education and of multicultural education. Civic education is not in opposition to multicultural education: multicultural education can help disclose the potentials in each citizen who represents a culture, thus adding new qualities to our cultural and national identity.

Multicultural education must accept the different cultural backgrounds of students, which have been determined by legislative frameworks and specific relational experience between the majority society and its minorities. Generic goals and distributive strategies of educational action are influenced by external contexts. McLaren (1994) defines four basic relational models:

1. conservative multiculturalism, with a ruling dominant culture that leads to assimilating smaller cultures;
2. submissive inter-cultural relations, in which the weaker culture strives to become assimilated;
3. cultural isolationism, leading to marginalisation of the weaker culture; and
4. liberal relations.

There are two varieties of cultural liberalism: dogmatic liberalism (denying the influence of differences), and critical liberalism, which acknowledging historic, economic, and media situations (1994:57). It is critical liberalism that can be taken as an adequate context for education, one that creates conditions in which to develop cultural identity among minorities as well as the majority society. Any assimilation or cultural marginalisation leads to deep conflicts of citizenship and a damaged relationship with the society, which consequently impairs the relationship with the state. On the other hand, multicultural education should accept the rule of individual autonomy and freedom. Cultural contact and the understanding of other culture(s) may be imposed, i.e. assumed in obligatory school classes, but without the development of mental understanding of the values and experience, or consisting of compulsory experience leading to the overthrow of an individual's own inner values: such 'understanding' can lead to the loss of autonomy for the subject, and impaired autonomy erodes the context of democratic citizenship.

Any co-existence between different cultures is only possible if they communicate with one another. Pupils need to be prepared for inter-cultural encounters. Multicultural education must lead to preventing the culture shocks that leave behind a negative experience of cultural contact. Being prepared the development of a mechanism on the individual level that helps reduce the degree of dissonance and restore harmony between new information and the original cognitive model; bringing the perception of reality and the individual's real attitudes into a state of consistent integrity.

Culture is a system of cognisance, symbols and action. Thus, it is possible to transfer cultures in the form of systems of signs and actions (technology know-how). These form the fundamental channels for the functions and transference of cultural identity. Understanding and embracing these channels provides opportunities for intra-cultural and multicultural communication to flow, which is why multicultural education is linked with developing communication competencies in pupils. Communication competencies involve both correlating linguistic abilities (pre-school Romany children may attend Czech language courses in the Czech Republic), and emotional involvement. A basic prerequisite of inter-cultural communication is understanding combined with interpretation, which helps an individual to capture the cultural meanings in foreign sign systems. Such understanding may lead to diverse results:

1. an individual perceives sign systems and values, but takes them for a part of another culture, him/herself staying outside;
2. an individual embraces another culture, takes it for his/her own, his cultural identity shifts.

Understanding another culture may serve as a vehicle for enlarging one's perception of the diverse manifestations of universal human values and a universal human cultural tradition. Stress is laid on general aspects while specific aspects may be neglected. Another approach pursues the goal of understanding a different culture for the culture's sake and for the sake of the human bearers of that culture. The latter implements the transition from having a relationship with an abstract idea to developing an open relationship with actual individuals which is based on tolerance, empathy, co-operation (as a desirable relational form) (Občan a občanství, 2001: 215 – 253).

Cultural identity will be modified, consciously or unconsciously, through embracing another culture if the initial criteria and view of the world assumed from the original culture are lost in the course of inter-cultural communication. The process of embracing a culture may be fuelled both by estrangement felt toward one's own culture, and by an overwhelming attraction on the part of the other culture (e.g. the lure of the welfare system that is one of the Western consumer society's values).

In the course of communication, individuals may embrace whole cultures or elements of cultures and encounter different social roles. This process may lead to different results (for example R. Redfield and M. J. Herskovits on acculturation). The most important are:

• Cultural assimilation. The individual gives up the foundations of his/her own culture and assumes the signs and values of another. Consciously or unconsciously, a process of replacing and discharging the original cultural signs takes place, slowly eroding the coherence of the original culture. This process includes a risk of becoming a 'marginal' person with no culture which is profoundly one's own, a person who stays on the verge of both cultures who faces all the social and psychological consequences of marginalisation.

• Integration. Different cultures and their bearers are independent entities sharing the same cultural space.

What influence does a change of cultural identity have on individual citizenship? On one hand, the individual remains a citizen of the country after his cultural identity has changed because he continues to live within the political and legal system of that country. On the other hand, the individual becomes member of his new 'community' or social group,

defined through the values that s/he has assumed and accepted as her/his own. S/he may continue to be a citizen of the same country, but is no longer member of the same social group within which s/he has realised public relationships.

Environmental influence may be connected to a multitude of simultaneous factors, for example children of immigrant parents face enculturation consisting of embracing the fundaments of the original parental culture whilst simultaneously absorbing cultural influences that exist outside the family and which are based on different systems of signs, meanings, values, and so on. Otherwise, an individual may face marginalisation, erosion of public relationships and consequently of his/her citizenship.

Multicultural education is primarily an education for intercultural understanding which also provides knowledge of other cultures. Therefore it prefers methods that stimulate students to work cooperatively and develop individual points of view. Such methods develop experience, feelings, emotions, abilities and skills in pupils. Learning by experiment is the central method. Without real experience of contact with a different culture and its people, multicultural education is reduced merely to discussing other cultures. Only the real experience can show the pupil whether s/he is able to understand and accept a different culture, to embrace its spirit, to see how relations between different cultures influence his/her emotional and cognitive perceptions and value orientation. The cultural background to a pupil's individual experience must become the source of innovation and diversity of collective experience.

It is the child's personal identity and competence to live, and to cooperate with different people by sharing common human values and common goals for non-violent co-existence, that forms the core of any multicultural education. Multicultural integration based on universal equality, freedom and solidarity is Europe's next challenge.

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