

**ETHNIC IDENTITY AND EDUCATIONAL IMPACTS FOR ANTI-DISCRIMINATION
IN SCHOOL-AGE YEARS**

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Abstract: Developing multicultural sensitivity and social integration skills is an objective condition for "an equal society". A society in which all the members are socially protected, regardless of the differences between them. Applying ethnorelativism through active multicultural sensitivity means skills of anti-discrimination or deterring prejudiced thinking, social discrimination and racism. The school is the place where representatives of different ethnic groups meet most often and intensively. The social development of the individual in school-age years focuses on such diverse personality areas as self-identity, independence, gender roles, moral codes, values and achievements. The self-identity constructs are always connected with the characteristics of the ethnic identity or the belonging to a particular ethnic community. Ethnic identity is shared consciousness of belonging to a social sub-group within the wider society whose culture differs from it in a meaningful way. Thus, the school is obliged to exert educational impacts for equal inclusion of all students in the class and extracurricular activities, but above all – to form social skills of responsible citizenship in every student. Postmodern school does not allow discrimination and injustice to students. It creates and maintains an inclusive environment, where equality is regardless of differences in ethnicity. The uniqueness of practising the principle of equality in school is expressed in providing transpersonal space for all adolescents to be able to turn inwards in themselves (introspection) and recognizing the need for change in accordance with the expectations of the environment and the specificities of school-age children development. The choice of a person to form a polycultural identity is an act of self-awareness based on social learning. It can be assumed that this process deepens with the participation of the individual in class, out-of-class, out-of-school or real-life forms of education. The paper presents the methodological aspects of the Education for Anti-discrimination technological approach. The Educational Approach for Anti-discrimination opposes the understanding of education as a "unity of teaching and learning". This understanding highlights the static moment of the teaching - learning relationship. In contrast to this view, learning is seen as an overall phenomenon characterized by its dynamic, active – transforming, experiential essential characteristics. The approach puts forward integrative educational activity based on both the epistemological and on the functional and technological status of learning as a social phenomenon. The sociopsychological purpose of moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism is the implementation of the idea that people today, despite being different, are equal. Acceptance and tolerance of cultural diversity, projected in the Education for Anti-discrimination technological approach, is a prerequisite for adopting the "community of different cultures" perspective.

Keywords: ethnic identity, ethnocentrism, ethnorelativism, education for anti-discrimination.

1. INTRODUCTION

The diversity of languages, cultures, borders, neighborhoods, wars and peace poses a dilemma for the world: *for or against* ethnic cultures. History reveals that the attempt to live "together" despite cultural differences caused a lot of grief, but today it is power and even social wealth. Thus, it is completely realistic to think that different ethnic identities can gather under a huge shield living on together for the future⁵⁰.

In the time of growing globalization for many children (and for many of us) remains negative the lack of necessary knowledge and flexibility to maximize the value of existing cultural capital of our education.⁵¹

The social development of the individual in school-age years focuses on such diverse personality areas as self-identity, independence, gender roles, moral codes, values and achievements. The self-identity constructs are

⁵⁰ Radev, P. *Rykovodstvo na obuchitelia*, Proekt na: „Razvitie na nediskriminacionno kachestveno obrazovanie za romskite deca“. Sofia, 2005, p. 67.

⁵¹ Vitanova, N. *Sindromyt "nepriemane na drugia" v konteksta na interkulturnoto obrazovanie*. Sp. Pedagogika, br. 5 - 6, Sofia, 2009.

always connected with the characteristics of the ethnic identity or the belonging to a particular ethnic community. Ethnic identity is shared consciousness of belonging to a social sub-group within the wider society whose culture differs from it in a meaningful way.

Amid all the changes related to the social development of every individual, ethnic identity is the most dominant trend in the person's growing to maturity. It may spark interest in anything different (analogous to foreign), but it may also develop into denial and destruction of the different, respectively the Other. In the conditions of an integral society, a conflict between ethnic and national identity is intolerable. Every citizen, regardless of the ethnic group to which they belong, should develop a strong commitment to their national identity in every area. It is the task of educational institutions to achieve this goal, as a factor in preparing students for successful self-fulfilment based on the mechanism of social integration.

2. FROM ETHNOCENTRISM TO ETHNORELATIVISM

The principle of equality is the basis of understanding the movement of individual consciousness and behavior from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism.

There are two recognized general conceptual approaches to defining equality⁵²:

1. Formal equality – people to be treated equally in similar situations.

Presumes that if every ethnic group is treated identically to the other, then the outcome will be fair and honest. Different groups have different needs though, so this approach does not always lead to equal opportunities.

Hence, due to objective reasons, the approach of formal equality allows injustice, because ignoring important differences to provide policies and practices that are the same for everyone can lead to inequality;

2. Substantive equality – people to be treated differently when they are in different situations.

Takes account of differences between ethnic groups and tries to cater for the needs of all ethnic groups when developing policies and decisions about resources. It assumes that resources and policy implementation may need to be modified to better reflect the needs of all.

The approach of substantive equality goes beyond the ostensible fairness of the decision and strives to achieve “full equality in practice”. Substantive equality is often expressed through the language of “equality of opportunity”.

In school-age years dynamics occur in the conceptualization of the *I/ethnic identity*. It is connected with six major transitions through which adolescents move from one state to another and from one situation to another⁵³ (Table 1).

Table 1. *Model of the logical level of the individual's subjective experience*

	Level	Typical Concept/concern	Function
1.	Spiritual/connection	How am I connected with my culture/society?	Vision and interpretation
2.	Identity	Who am I? Why am I here?	Role and mission
3.	Values/beliefs	What is important to me? Why?	Motivation and permission
4.	Competences/capabilities	How do I do things? What can I do?	Perception and direction
5.	Behaviour	What do I do?	Action and reaction
6.	Environment	Where? When?	Constraints and opportunities

The above model shows that the various *behaviors* of the individual include *the entire spectrum* of the *personal-social* context, and *the individual identity is the result of all existing and learned values* and value orientations. Apart from raising issues related to the vital goals of the individual, (ethnic) identity is the answer to the question: *What do I mean by 'a meaningful life'?*

Applying the principle of *social equality* or the formation of consciousness/identity in school-age years, *ethnorelativism* emphasizes on implementing educational influences aimed at anti-discrimination. Those are focused on *respect to and acceptance of ethnic and cultural diversity* and providing space for peaceful co-existence of minorities with the majority culture. The key influences within the contents of the educational process related to this principle are aimed at overcoming the majority's prejudiced thinking and stereotyping of minority groups as being innately inferior (in terms of intelligence, skills, capabilities, etc.) to the dominant racial group.

⁵² Popchev, P., *Evropejski syiuz: Prinos kym globalnata sigurnost i stabilnost*. S. 2006, p. 52.

⁵³ Merlevede, P., D. Bridu, R. Vandam, *7 styпки kym emocionalna inteligentnost*. Sofiia, 2005, p.90

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Developing skills in *self-acceptance/ethnic identity and acceptance of the different from me*, ethnorelativism relies on *psychological and pedagogical interactions* between teachers and students characterized by *a conscious expression of feelings and non-judgmental behavior to ethnicity*. Psychological and pedagogical support of students means to create psychological and social space where they can be accepted with understanding and faith in their abilities. It is the teachers' task to help ethnic minority students become aware of their strengths and thus develop active self-help skills and assertive behaviour.

Hence, ethnic minority representatives, as well as the majority, will gradually cease to perceive *the other* solely as a threat and develop skills in cooperativeness, social partnership and dialogue, regardless of and despite ethnic differences.

Support of the ethnic identity in school is, actually, implementing the principle of equal treatment for all students and is expressed in the following **main highlights**:

1. Ensuring equality of all ethnic representations in school is a prerequisite for every student to reach their full intellectual potential; to become more resistant to errors and failures; to communicate freely and manifest openly their imagination and creativity.

2. When there are conditions for equal participation in class and extracurricular activities, every teenager gets to know the world interacting with their peers and teachers. When this relationship is good, the teenager develops self-confidence and is not afraid to experiment and to gain social experience. The ultimate need of movement, social environment and selfexpression and achievement is fundamental⁵⁴.

3. A relationship of equality despite ethnic differences is the prime cause for the development of students' autonomy and confidence in their own capabilities and strengths. They are based on respect for the student's personality, confidence in their capabilities, as well as setting requirements that do not exceed the actual competence of adolescents.

4. Equality in the school class is among the main prerequisites for developing resilience to stress, which makes it possible to experience easily negative feelings associated with competition and disapproval. When teachers and classmates are responsive to ethnic identity, overcoming the typical of the school age and environment fears and worries becomes less painful and takes shorter time.

5. Ensuring equality, despite ethnic differences in the social group of the school class, is a factor for the development of students' social feelings. Good interpersonal relations and interactions in the individual class of the school are transferred as an effective model onto other important figures and the whole social environment of the students.

6. Since practising equality is based on specific rules, following them facilitates communication and makes it possible to maintain strong connections and relationships. It is an obligatory condition for the emergence of adolescents' sense of community.

7. An equal interaction with their peers and with the authority builds a value system and supports compliance with social norms and rules of conduct.

8. Creating healthy social relationships in the of school-age stage, based on ethnorelativism, is the prime reason for the emergence of a reliable sense of trust in others and the world, which in the later stages of human development is projected onto others and becomes a natural approach in interpersonal social communication.

9. Every student placed in a situation of equality retains their function as an active person. Their activity reflects their own characteristics and the need to understand themselves.

10. The uniqueness of practising the principle of equality in school is expressed in providing transpersonal space for all adolescents to be able to turn inwards in themselves (introspection) and recognizing the need for change in accordance with the expectations of the environment and the specificities of school-age children development.

Finding your own ethnic identity is the deep context of individual self-actualization through the stages of school-age years. When adolescents are engaged primarily in search of answers about the meaning of life, about human beings and their destiny, they undertake a difficult task because to Jaspers' words "no one is given to go beyond his time" [2] we may appropriately add "and beyond himself and the boundaries of his space".

Ethnorelativism is accepting ethnic identity by overcoming that extreme individualism which means a doctrinal self-sufficiency of the individual (whose essence grounds are only in himself) and approaching the value of the "open personality type" phenomenon. This is the person who "becomes" himself in the flow of the living

⁵⁴ Dimitrova Zl., *Socializacija detej posredstvom sportivnoj animacii*, International Scientificand Practical Conference "WORLD SCIENCE" ISSN 2413-1032 , № 1(17), Vol.5, January 2017, p. 52.

being, who in his dynamic contact with reality strives willfully for a more humane order [4]. Knowledge, acceptance and recognition of the other's cultural identity is a necessary condition for achieving social integration with different ethnic identities [3]. Consequently, acquiring ethnorelativism skills is a process that is expressed in the development of a sense of sharing common responsibilities (to the planet, the future, the people in need, etc.).

3. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE EDUCATION FOR ANTI-DISCRIMINATION TECHNOLOGICAL APPROACH

The *identity crisis*⁵⁵, seen through the awareness of ethnic differences, can be overcome through the development of every individual's *multicultural awareness*. The formation of this construct is the ability of individuals to accept cultural differences and *move from ethnocentricity to ethnorelativism*.

Acquiring knowledge about their own ethnic identity is a fundamental event in the age development of every adolescent, which would influence positively the *identity crisis* in school-age years.

In this sense, we can draw the conclusion that awareness of the ethnic identity is a necessity in school-age years. The quality of this awareness predetermines the development of multicultural sensitivity and hence, the construction of social competence for *social integration with the Other*, regardless of them being representatives of another ethnic group, i. e. implementing ethnorelativism.

Tendencies to globalization are among the factors leading to changing the model of education. "Constructivism as a base of modern teaching enables improving the quality of education. As a methodology constructivism is in the base of productive educational technologies... Consolidation between these technologies is the intensive interaction" [1].

The *Educational Approach for Anti-discrimination* opposes the understanding of education as a "unity of teaching and learning". This understanding highlights the *static moment of the teaching – learning relationship*.

In contrast to this view, learning is seen as *an overall phenomenon* characterized by its *dynamic, active – transforming, experiential essential characteristics*. The approach puts forward integrative educational activity based on both the *epistemological* and on the *functional and technological status* of learning as a social phenomenon.

GOALS of the Education for Anti-discrimination technological approach:

I. Educational goals:

1. To broaden the knowledge of child rights and human rights in general
2. To focus the attention on experienced situations of intolerance and discriminatory attitude
3. To encourage individual anti-discriminatory patterns of thinking/behaviour
4. To foster self-knowledge and assertive behaviour by focusing on the individual's thoughts and feelings and asserting individual rights.

II. Development goals:

1. To enhance the sensitivity to cross-cultural, age and social differences
2. To develop skills in tolerance and communication of non-hatred
3. To establish the principle of equality in researching stereotypical attitudes
4. To stimulate constructive leadership behaviour through developing skills of analyzing alternatives and decision making

III. Upbringing goals:

1. To support the attitude of equality in interpersonal interactions
2. To foster skills of cooperation and mutual understanding
3. To promote altruistic behaviour towards the disadvantaged

Group training is the main form of training of the proposed model. Group-work performs (1) *pragmatic* and (2) *axiological functions*:

- according to (1) group-work includes the *dialectic between identification by others and self-identification, a set of objectively ascribed and subjectively experienced identity*;
- according to (2) learning in a group develops *constructive attitudes and the skill to tackle rivalry in interpersonal interaction*.

The main method used by the *Education for Anti-discrimination* training program to achieve its psychological and educational goals is trainees' *experiential experience*. Placed in a training situation (safe and secure environment), they participate in psychological simulations, organized according to an interactive

⁵⁵ Eriksyn, E. *Identichnost, mladost i kriza*. Sofiia, 1998, p. 37 – 45.

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technology. Each of them represents *a staged situation, real or imaginary, so that their performance constitute approximately one image of a particular real incident/event*. The experienced in these situations provides conditions for learning from *the success of some, the experience and mistakes of others; the variety of events for everyone to see themselves more clearly; the attitude of others to become aware of one's own abilities*. Thus, *Education for Anti-discrimination* becomes meaningful and experience allows anyone on the path of self-reflection to realize their own role (in the context of tolerance) and in the group (in the context of polycultural identity).

The areas of work with students are:

Confidence - fostering a sense of self-worth;

Positive self-esteem - developing self-esteem based on self awareness of one's own resource;

Personal resilience - identifying coping strategies to handle the risks of going through personal and development crises;

Connection with the significant others - establishing lasting relationships based on trust and security;

Belongingness - fostering a sense of being important to someone/ the group;

Positive feedback - providing authentic feedback regarding successfully completed everyday tasks;

Emotional security - identifying a significant adult they can rely on and share with, not being afraid of discrediting;

Self-respect - developing awareness of privacy in regard to the objectification of the idea of identity;

Absence of violence - practising violence prevention among children and adults against children.

The **main characteristics** marking the limits of the implementation of the *Education for Anti-discrimination* technological approach are the methodological tools guaranteeing the achievement of the set objectives and tasks, as well as details of its organization, preparation and implementation.

Following the principle of bringing the real world in school, the *Education for Anti-discrimination* technological approach in the stage of school-age years strives to *focus on contemporary reality, where the breaking of social bonds, the deformation of ethical standards and the blurring of values have become something common*.

These are the specifics of the overall organization, preparation and implementation of the creative process when applying the *Education for Anti-discrimination* technological approach. Hence, its pragmatic efficiency depends on creating favourable conditions for the *participants' collaboration - teachers and students; frank discussions of problematic situations in teenagers' everyday life; joint discussions and selection of positive/negative events and social processes that have a significant influence on adolescents and concern them; equality in the distribution of participants in specific activities*.

Organization and methodological tools. In its structural consistency, group-work with students can be content-based and spatially situated in the context of formal, non-formal and informal education.

The training of students, however, is always organized in the following **staged logical hierarchical steps/phases**:

Phase 1. Experiencing (activity, "doing");

Phase 2. Sharing (sharing reactions and observations about what happened);

Phase 3. Reflection (discussing patterns and dynamics to get an insight into the essence of the experience);

Phase 4. Concluding (discussing patterns and the way in which what people have learned is related to the real world);

Phase 5. Application (using what they have learned, changing previous behaviour).

Training activities encourage students to learn through personal involvement; to develop their knowledge, skills, attitudes and values; to change; to participate; to take responsibility; to build and enhance their confidence. In this context, the *aims* of the training activities in the *Education for Anti-discrimination* technological approach are: to teach young people the skill to respect, but not necessarily agree with different views on an issue; to develop the skills to find mutually acceptable solutions; to deepen the understanding that conflict of opinion can be used constructively in social interaction.

5. CONCLUSION

The sociopsychological purpose of moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism is the implementation of the idea that people today, despite being different, are equal. Acceptance and tolerance of cultural diversity, projected in the *Education for Anti-discrimination* technological approach, is a prerequisite for adopting the "community of different cultures" perspective.

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