Civic and Intercultural Education: A Means for Community Development and Attitude Change

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Abstract

Our societies are going through a process of continuous transformation. The challenges and opportunities of diversity and globalization can only be addressed if civic education and intercultural education are interrelated. More often than not, there is a lack of coherence between educational practices based on these approaches. Moreover, even if the principles and methods of civic and intercultural education are used for international as well as local development, very seldom their impact is measured through the means of scientific research. In this study, a methodology of civic and intercultural education was piloted, and its impact was measured regarding teachers' and students' attitudes toward Roma. We measured the acculturation orientations and stereotypes of teachers and students involved in a civic and intercultural program. The results show that there are changes in both teachers' and students' attitudes toward Roma.

Keywords

civic education, intercultural education, Roma, stereotypes, acculturation orientations

Introduction

The main paradigm of this article states the indivisible link between civic education and intercultural education. Civic education without intercultural education risks to ignore an important part of society, to simplify the reality, and fails to address issues related to the specificities of various groups, as well as the challenges and opportunities of diversity. Intercultural education without civic education may run into two biases: either the approach in which diversity has to be "dealt with" or the approach in which the intercultural aspects are taken into account, but only on the surface, without in-depth analysis of social and political context and without significant contribution to social transformation. This perspective demands us first of all to recognize that reality is plural, complex, and dynamic, and that interaction is an integral part of all lives and cultures. It leads to ensuring mutual respect and development of communities that support each other and to eliminating relationships based on domination and rejection. In the words of Peter Lauritzen, it sounds like this:

> He who reduces political language to difference only will come out as an individualist and social Darwinist, he who does the same with regard to equality will end up as collectivist. It is only by keeping the concepts of difference and equality in balance that one can speak of a fair and just society. (Ohana & Rothemund, 2008, p. 138)

Diversity is not a new phenomenon, but the perspectives on diversity, the interpretations, and practices in this area represent a continuous challenge. Diversity as a concept is widely used in daily life and political discourses. The current perspective on diversity shifted from celebration, appreciation, or management of diversity to inclusion and development of an intercultural society. This perspective moves beyond celebration of diversity and organization of "folkloric events" to the creation of sustainable frameworks for affirming cultural identity in all aspects of life, as well as equal opportunities for personal development and contribution to the society in its entirety.

There is still a widespread tendency to use culture in political discourses for the purpose of exclusion policies (Titley & Lentin, 2008). Stereotypes, prejudices, and hate speech are being used and promoted in the media, in schools, and other public institutions. They act as a filter of information. They affect not only the victim of the bias but also every individual who witnesses the bias as well as the perpetrator (Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009).

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Haslam and Dovidio (2010) analyzed the researches in the area and identified the main factors that enhance and maintain bias: personality and individual differences, intergroup conflict, social categorization, and social identity. Education and learning about the subject of the stereotypes or prejudices facilitates the development of acceptance of differences and contributes to social cohesion (Plant & Devine, 2009).

People often resist change due to the cognitive dissonance related to their previous beliefs and behaviors (Tausch & Hewstone, 2010). Conscious effort and perseverance are needed for real change to take place. Educational programs should take into account this aspect and should focus not only on giving participants the opportunity to learn about the changes they need to make but also to reflect and to act upon them.

A real impact of civic and intercultural education implies "moving away from a focus on individual (identity) difference/s towards a focus on finding, through principled intercultural discourse, consensus for social action to redress injustice and inequality in the multicultural society" (Ohana & Otten, 2012, p.219).

Intercultural education offers an alternative to multiculturalism (Lentin & Titley, 2011; O'Cinneide, 2012; Rus, 2008). The intercultural approach facilitates the dialogue between different sociocultural groups, addresses power relations, and encourages positive relation in the society. Intercultural education aims to ensure a balance between freedom of expression and respect for cultural diversity, acknowledging and respecting diverse practices and worldviews.

The approach and methods of intercultural education need to be oriented toward focusing on "social action," to develop participants' competences to act for social change that they identified as necessary (Ohana & Otten, 2012) and to take a stand against discrimination, racism, and other forms of intolerance and social injustice.

Understanding how stereotypes and prejudices affect the self, the others, and the human relations is at the forefront of developing attitudes and behaviors that promote positive social change, prevent social injustices, and enhance positive relations. For this reason, there is a need for qualitative and quantitative studies that aim at understanding the means through which intercultural attitudes, abilities, and knowledge can be developed (Perry & Southwell, 2011).

The Intercultural Institute of Timisoara[1] has piloted over the years a series of methods aiming at developing teachers' and students' intercultural competence and motivation for participation in local decision-making processes, as well as the development of a nuanced and fair understanding of Roma issues and contribution to their social development. Roma minority is 1 of the 20 recognized national minorities in Romania, one of the most disadvantaged and discriminated against. Romania is the European country with the biggest Roma population and a wide diversity of communities, some maintaining a traditional lifestyle, others being almost completely assimilated, some having a socioeconomic status similar to that of the majority population, while most of them are living in extreme poverty (Rus, 2008).

A series of public policies are implemented in different areas of life, to ensure equal access of Roma people to education and employment, but very little is done to change the negative attitudes of the majority population toward Roma. Recent sociological studies confirm the persistence of high levels of negative attitudes toward Roma, even if there are some improvements over the years (Paunescu, 2011; Tarnovschi, 2012).

A Civic and Intercultural Education Program

This study makes an analysis of the impact of a civic and intercultural education methodology requiring students to analyze the situation of the Roma community at local revel and formulate a public policy proposal related to an issue affecting members of Roma communities.

The method was piloted at national level in 2011 in 11 schools, finalized with a public presentation at the Romanian Parliament, and at county level in 2012 in 9 schools. The aim of the program is to promote competent and responsible participation with government at all levels. The program helps participants learn how to monitor and influence public policy while developing support for democratic values and principles. The program takes place over a 3-month period in which teachers attend a training course and implement a project with their students. It is based on a methodology developed at international level in the CIVITAS Network[1], adapted to Romanian realities and developed by the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara to include the intercultural dimension.

This method offers students a framework to develop a thorough understanding of the situation of Roma communities and to overcome stereotypes and prejudices. It addresses, at the same time, the need to stimulate the civic engagement and constructive attitudes based on democracy and human rights.

The main activities implemented in the program by the students, under the coordination of their teacher, are as follows: (a) analysis of the problems of the local Roma community; (b) selection of a problem for in-depth study by the class, a problem that can be solved through local public policies; (c) collecting information about the problem from various sources, including members of the Roma community, public institutions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), specialists, and analysis of possible solutions; (d) drafting a public policy that could solve the problem; (e) developing an action plan to influence public authorities to adopt the public policy proposed by the students; (f) organizing a showcase in which students present their projects; and (g) reflecting on the learning experience. Classes involved in the program are then invited to present their projects in a public event attended by public authorities and the media.

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[1]http://www.civiced.org/programs/civitas

How acceptable it is for the majority population that the minority (Roma, in our case) adopt the culture of the majority population?	How acceptable it is for the majority population that the minority (Roma, in our case) maintain their culture?	
	YES	**NO**
YES	**Integrationism**	**Assimilationism**
NO	**Segregrationism**	**Exclusionism**

Figure 1. Acculturation orientations of majority population toward Roma.

Prior to the implementation of the activities with students, teachers attend a blended learning training course, which has the following objectives:

- understanding of the way in which public institutions function, the decision-making procedures, and the role of citizens in a democratic society;
- development of intercultural sensitivity to understand the benefits and challenges of diversity, especially related to the fact that:
  - ignoring cultural differences is not a solution,
  - imposing an ethnocultural belonging on someone is unacceptable,
  - different ethnocultural belongings do not necessarily imply visible differences,
  - common ethnocultural belongings do not necessarily imply homogeneity, and
  - not all cultural practices are acceptable in a human rights framework;
- in-depth understanding of the situation of Roma communities in Romania; and
- learning to implement the program's specific civic and intercultural methodology with students.

As part of the program, the students learn about their Roma people living in their neighborhood. Most often people rely on stereotypes when interacting with the Roma, and usually avoid getting to know their Roma neighbors. The students are guided through a process in which the output is a public policy solution to one of the problems of the Roma community. This program offers them the opportunity to interact with members of the Roma community, to learn about the problems they are struggling with, and to view them as equal citizens. Students find out that some of the problems the Roma are facing are very similar to the ones the rest of the society is facing, while others are very different, often due to the cultural specificities and usually the poor living conditions.

The impact of the program is evaluated both at teachers' level, as well as at students' level. Through a pretest–posttest methodology, the teachers' and students' stereotypes and attitudes toward the culturally different (respectively, Roma minority) are being assessed before and after they are involved in the program.

Attitudes Toward Roma Minority

Method and Sample

This study uses a pretest–posttest design to measure the changes in teachers' and students' orientations of acculturation and stereotypes toward Roma and Romanians. A group of 33 teachers and 250 students, from 20 schools, belonging mainly to the majority population participated in this study. About half of them participated in the civic and intercultural education program (experimental group), while the other half participated in a civic education program using a similar methodology but without intercultural component (control group).

Instruments

Drawing on previous research by Berry, Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, and Senécal (1997) proposed the following acculturation orientations of majority members—integrationism, individualism, assimilationism, segregationism, and exclusionism—and developed a scale to measure these acculturation orientations. Basically, these orientations of acculturation represent the combination of possible answers to the following two questions: (a) How acceptable it is for the majority population that the minority (Roma, in our case) maintain their culture? and (b) How acceptable it is for the majority population that the minority (Roma, in our case) adopt the culture of the majority population? (see Figure 1).

Integrationism refers to the valorization of maintenance of certain aspects of minority identity and willingness to modify own institutional practices and certain aspects of majority culture to facilitate integration of minority groups. Assimilationism refers to desire to have minorities give up their cultural/identity characteristics to adopt the cultural/identity characteristics of majority. Segregationism represents tolerance for the minority culture/identity as long as they live separately, in specific neighborhoods or regions, and do not mix with the majority population. Exclusionism means no tolerance for the minorities' culture/identity and belief that certain groups can never assimilate within majority community. There is also another acculturation orientation that completely ignores cultural, religious, and linguistic belonging while focusing on personal characteristics—individualism.

The scale developed based on this model by Bourhis and Montreuil (2005) is not intended to categorize individuals as

being integrationist, individualist, assimilationist, segregationist, or exclusionist. This scale is intended to assess the extent to which individuals endorse *each* of the acculturation orientations, depending on the specific group being considered. The teachers' acculturation orientations are measured with regard to six areas of life: culture, customs, work, endogamy/exogamy, language, and neighborhood. The students' acculturation orientations are measured with regard to five areas of life: customs, educational activities, friends, language, and neighborhood.

Taking into account the potential of social desirability of the Host Community Acculturation Scale, another instrument was used to have a more nuanced perspective of the teachers' and students' attitudes toward Roma. A list of attributes was used to measure the stereotypes of students and teachers toward Roma and Romanians.

The data collected were analyzed in SPSS using the paired-samples *t* test.

Results

The analysis of the results in the pretest samples of teachers and students shows a medium level of exclusionism (1.74/5), segregationism (2.25/5), and assimilationism (2.14/5), and slightly higher results on individualism (4.15/5) and integrationism (3.88/5). There were no significant differences between the experimental group and the control group in the pretest phase. At first sight, these results can be slightly encouraging, with pretty high level of integrationism and quite low level of exclusionism. However, the analysis of the results regarding the stereotypes shows that the entire sample associates significantly more negative attributes with Roma (4 attributes associated significantly more with Roma than with Romanians) and more positive attributes with Romanians (11 attributes associated significantly more with Romanians than with Roma). There was no negative attribute associated more with Romanians than with Roma and there was only 1 positive attribute associated more with Roma than Romanians—musicians. These results are comparable with the results of various studies done at national level which show that the majority population has mainly negative attitudes toward Roma (Rus, 2008), validating therefore the sample used in this study.

The participation in the civic and intercultural program generated significant changes in the acculturation orientations of teachers and students after their participation in the program, both compared with the pretest phase and with the control group.

Regarding changes in the orientations of acculturation, after the implementation of the civic and intercultural program, teachers are less assimilationists, $t(17) = 2.16$, $p< .05$, and students are less individualists, $t(138) = 2.83$, $p< .01$. The fact that teachers have lower scores on assimilationist orientation shows they understood the importance of maintaining and affirming cultural identity and expect much less

from the Roma people to give up their cultural identity to adopt the cultural identity of the majority community. This attitudinal change of teachers could have contributed to the attitudinal change of students. Not only are students less individualist but there are also significant changes in relation to specific areas of life.

Students have, after the implementation of the program, higher scores on the segregationist orientation regarding school activities and friends. They are also less exclusionist regarding school activities, $t(139) = 3.43$, $p< .01$, which means they are less inclined to consider that Roma should not attend the same school as them, and less integrationist, $t(135) = 6.08$, $p< .01$, which means they are not yet ready to consider them full members of the school community. Most of the statistical significant changes regarding students' acculturation orientations are related to the domain of school activities, which means that their participation in the project and activities of the program had a direct impact on this dimension, without being extrapolated to the other dimensions. The fact that the teachers have lower levels of assimilationism shows they understood the importance of cultural identity and focused on it. At the same time, students understood the importance of culture but failed to understand the importance of dialogue—which is shown in their higher levels of segregationism.

There were no significant changes generated by the participation in the program of the control group in general, just on specific domains of life. These changes are in the sense of higher scores regarding segregationism and assimilationism in certain domains of life. For example, the teachers were more assimilationists regarding culture, $t(14) = 2.09$, $p< .05$, and marriage, $t(14) = 2.20$, $p< .05$, and more segregationists regarding work, $t(14) = 2.97$, $p< .05$. The students were more segregationists regarding the neighborhood, $t(104) = 2.57$, $p< .05$.

Therefore, even if the results show fewer changes in the acculturation orientations than initially expected, the fact that in the control group the changes were in the other direction (more segregationists and more assimilationists) leads to the conclusion that the course had an important contribution to the development of more positive attitudes of the majority community toward Roma community and that the need for this type of programs is even greater. It appears that without organized educational processes, the tendency is to develop higher levels of assimilationism and segregationism.

There are also significant changes regarding the stereotypes of teachers and students toward Roma and Romanians. A comparative analysis was made between teachers' and students' stereotypes of Roma and Romanians before and after the course. Before the course, teachers associated mainly positive attributes with Romanians (11 attributes associated statistically significant more with Romanians than with Roma) and mainly negative attributes with Roma (4 attributes associated statistically significant more with Roma than with Romanians). After the course, they still associate positive attributes more with Romanians than with Roma (10

attributes associated statistically significant more with Romanians than with Roma), but they associate just 1 negative attribute statistically significant more with Roma than with Romanians. At the same time, the teachers in the control group continue to associate negative attributes with Roma even after the participation in the program (7 attributes associated statistically significant more with Roma than with Romanians). The changes in the students' stereotypes were not so significant.

We also made a comparative analysis of the students' and teachers' stereotypes toward Roma before and after the course, to have a more nuanced image of the results presented above. This analysis shows that there are changes in students' stereotypes in the sense of associating certain negative attributes to a smaller extent with Roma after the course than before the course (there are statistically significant differences on three negative attributes) and certain positive attributes to a larger extent (there are statistically significant differences on three positive attributes). Even if there were not many significant differences in the Roma–Romanian comparison, there are differences between the degree to which students associate attributes to Roma before and after the course. And this difference is in the sense of associating less negative and more positive attributes with Roma.

Therefore, we can state that participation in a training course and implementation of a civic intercultural program contribute to diminishing teachers' and students' negative attitudes toward Roma. These changes represent important steps in the process of Roma inclusion and in diminishing the negative perception of the majority population toward Roma.

Conclusion

The results are consistent with the results of a previous study carried on by the Intercultural Institute, using qualitative methods in a project involving cooperation between Roma and non-Roma young people. In that study, after their participation in the program, non-Roma participants did not have necessarily an overall better attitude about Roma, but they had a more nuanced understanding of the situation and of the relationships between Roma and the rest of the society and were able to overcome certain stereotypes (Jivan, Rus, & Bota, 2002).

This research proves, once again, that attitudinal changes are difficult to obtain and even more difficult to measure. Byram underlines the challenges related to the evaluation of attitudes and values—While abilities and knowledge can be adequately measured, the evaluation of attitudes and values creates a series of technical and moral difficulties (Bandura, 2003). The instruments need to take into account, on one hand, the social desirability and, on the other hand, the context and the purpose for which they are applied. This perspective was taken into account in the design and implementation of the study, as well as in the analysis of the results. For this reason, the conclusions are cautiously presented.

The results of this study show that punctual interventions aiming at increasing intercultural competence may have a positive impact but a rather limited impact. To have a better understanding of the way in which acculturation orientations are changing through educational activities, it would be necessary to compare the impact of various types of interventions.

One of the limits of the study is the fact that the relation between the attitudes of teachers and those of students was not analyzed. We believe that it is important to study this relation in future research to identify whether sole implementation of educational practices, regardless of teachers' personal attitudes, can contribute to the development of positive attitudes of students toward diversity or whether it is absolutely necessary that teachers attitudes be positive. In the first case, educational policies should focus on equipping teachers with educational tools to ensure an integrationist approach in education, whereas in the second case, the main activities need to aim at the development of teachers' intercultural competence.

Another limit of the study is the fact that teachers have voluntarily applied to participate in the program, having therefore an intrinsic motivation to participate and interest in the subject. Thus, we do not know to what extent the same results could be obtained with a group of teachers who are not interested in the subject. Students' participation, however, was not voluntary, as the activities of the project were part of the school curriculum.

The results of this research can offer relevant information for decision-making bodies regarding public policies in the field of education. For example, practices like the inclusion of information about Roma in the history manuals can not only lead to a decrease of exclusionism but could also lead to an increase of segregationism, and it is therefore important that they are accompanied by activities focused on dialogue, interaction, and human rights–based approaches.

The European Commission and other national and international bodies finance various programs in the field of civic and intercultural education for community development. As much as there is a need for these programs, there is also a need for extended research to measure the impact of these programs and to identify best practices of coherent, flexible, and sustainable approaches in education.

Note

1. Intercultural Institute of Timisoara is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) established in 1992 in Romania, with activities

in the field of intercultural education, education for democratic citizenship, human rights education, Roma inclusion, migration, and international cooperation (www.intercultural.ro).

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