



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEACHER IN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural Education is one of the newest in the area of studies on education. The development of the area took place in the context of social and historical transformations during the twentieth century. Developments were not uniform but were mediated by local conditions. According to the intercultural education, schools play an important role to establish the foundation for the transformation of the community and the avoiding from oppression and injustice. This article analyses the importance and the role of teachers in intercultural education. I prepared a research about the competence of teachers in an international school in Bucharest for the intercultural education.

Keywords: intercultural education, teacher competence, international school, communication problems

1. INTRODUCTION

As the teachers of changing world, we should recognise the importance educating our young people for life in a global village where international understanding is a key skill to communicate with the other people from all over the world. To reach this purpose, school staff and students are forming links with a wide range of people, groups and organisation from different countries and cultures. At the classroom level, teachers should develop an intercultural understanding perspective in students by giving tools to them to compare different events and issues in the past, present and future across countries. What we expect to success is an understanding that there are many ways of looking at people, history and issues and that environment colours our perception.

Especially in international schools, teachers should reinforce and support the values and messages of importance of intercultural understanding in every aspect of day to day school life, from classroom, to the playground, to the library, and back home to friends and families. Education in schools should encourage the international competence of the students. This competence provides monitoring racism and xenophobia and also developing of a tolerant atmosphere in the schools. As a result of this encouraging, young people in the schools can have ability to understand differences in the cultures and learn to live together with the people from other cultures, religions and languages (Smokova, 2010). Moreover, in some national and international schools, while there are common values, there are also significant differences: not only is the diversity more dynamic, with a tendency to more frequent and rapid changes, but also individuals are forced into constant intercultural relation and interaction (Snowball, 2009). I believe that intercultural education programmes and professional development trainings related with intercultural awareness for teachers can have a strong impact on furthering the values of international education in various local educational contexts and on a global scale.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In intercultural education, individuals from different cultures, religions and ethnics can work together, respect to each other, become familiar with the other traditions, regardless of whether s/he is minority or not (Fakirska, 2010). Intercultural education provides some fundamental principles to the students to overcome problems in these situations. The aims and content of intercultural education are theoretically related to questions of inequality, discrimination, ethnic/cultural diversity and citizenship. The importance of intercultural education can vary and it is directly related with visions on equity, ethnic/cultural identity, the multicultural society and to opinions on the role of the school in these (Leeman and Ledoux, 2005).



Teachers in the European Countries especially countries in the European Union should not only teach their own subjects to pupils of their own countries but also should teach them how to become European Citizens of the future. To reach this purpose, teachers should have some basic understanding for the intercultural education as follows:

- Teacher should have some basic knowledge about the Educational Systems in other European Countries,
- Teacher should speak several common European languages (at least intermediate level),
- Teacher should have enough capacity to teach in any other country in Europe (Demirel, 2010)

All we need to realise that intercultural education seeks possible ways of communicating each other and tries to establish the methods of transformation between us (Carignan, Sanders & Pourdavood, 2005). For some students, simple questions such as, 'Where are you from?' or 'What is your nationality?' can be very difficult question to answer in some schools. They have parents from different nationalities, cultures, languages and even different religions. It is difficult to say also that which their 'home country' is. They were born into a culture identity (that of their families, communities), but during their lifetime they can have an opportunity to develop this identity, to construct other identities or to change them (Stavenhagen, 2008).

The aim of the teachers in an international school must be to interact and communicate everyday effectively with the students, their parents and also colleagues from different cultures to overcome the problems mentioned in the previous paragraph. However, teacher can have some problems in their classroom when they communicate with their students. We can classify the communication problems of the teachers into six groups:

- Believing equality and similarity of the all cultures,
- Language problem,
- Non-verbal communication,
- Having prejudices, discrimination and stereotypes about different cultures and peoples,
- Comparing the cultures,
- Being very stressful and anxious during the teaching process.

These problems can usually cause obstacles between the teacher and the students (Barna, 1994).

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1. About the International School

This study focuses on the competences of teachers working in an international school in terms of intercultural education and intercultural awareness. The school has a diverse of more than 650 students from all over the world from far Asia to South America, to Africa, to Europe (more than 40 nationalities). The school consists of kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and high-school. The educational language of the school is English. It means all students need to learn English to understand all given subjects. In fact some students even do not speak English when they come first. But they learn in a short time the language to communicate and understand the subjects. These students aged 3 to 19 year-old have different cultures, religions, ethnics, nations, and different backgrounds. The school, in fact, is a kind of mosaic of races, cultures and religions. For this reason, it is extremely important to have background information for the importance of intercultural education and awareness.



3.2. About the Participants

My purpose was to search that how the teachers in the school are prepared, competent, experienced, and familiar with intercultural education, and intercultural awareness and understanding. I also wanted to focus whether local teachers have enough background to deal with intercultural atmosphere and environment. I also looked for whether local teachers feel comfortable teaching in an intercultural atmosphere. The teachers are also from very different countries and cultures such as Romania, UK, USA, Australia, Canada, France, Turkey, Greece, Russia, South Africa, New Zealand etc. All teachers have at least 3 years of experience in their subject areas. But this year is the first year of teaching in an international school for several teachers. 41 teachers from kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and high school participated for the survey and 12 of them were local teachers.

3.3. About the Questionnaire

I have prepared two different questionnaires:

Part A – Self Evaluation: One with including fifteen questions which was given to the teachers to understand their competence for intercultural education and intercultural awareness,

Part B – School Evaluation: The second questionnaire having ten questions is to research the competence of the school for being intercultural atmosphere.

These questionnaires were established with two alternative answers “agree” and “disagree”. This type of questionnaires has some disadvantages because it limits the number of possible answers into two alternatives. It means that questionnaire forces to say only “agree” or “disagree” and no possible choice for “no comment”. However, the main advantage of this type is that it prevents giving neutral responses that cannot be considered.

4. TABLES

The results of the questionnaires given below present the number of each response for the statements. The tables were given separate for both types of questionnaire.

Table 1. Result of Self-Evaluation Questionnaire

Nr	Statement	Agree	Disagree
1	I have worked two or more different countries	24	17
2	This year is my first year teaching in an international school	5	36
3	I know what intercultural education means	38	3
4	I am comfortable teaching in culturally different classrooms	31	10
5	I am comfortable dealing with parents of diverse cultures	31	10
6	I would rather teach in mono-cultural school settings	19	22
7	I have limited cross-cultural experiences	8	33
8	I believe that intercultural education is good for world peace and understanding	41	0
9	I have completed projects or activities that included aspects of intercultural education	17	24
10	I am unsure how biases and stereotypes that I might have could unintentionally influence my classroom instruction	9	32
11	I can develop strategies that engage all students in instruction and that help them express themselves confidently at school	33	8
12	I have participated in discussion that have focused on how to adapt different teaching strategies to the various learning styles of my students	29	12



13	I have limited understanding of the complex relationship among society, schools, and ethnicity	1	40
14	I am comfortable raising questions about intercultural issues in my teaching	34	7
15	I, as a teacher, should be familiar with customs and languages of students	35	6

Table 2. Result of School Evaluation Questionnaire

Nr	Statement	Agree	Disagree
1	School gives importance to the intercultural understanding	38	3
2	School organizes some events to encourage the intercultural understanding	38	3
3	School encourages the preservation of cultural differences between students of different countries	38	3
4	I did not observe any evidence of bias in school curriculum, materials or in text books	32	9
5	I have possibilities to express my own culture in extra-curricular activities	23	18
6	I have received instruction on how to plan and implement intercultural lessons	14	27
7	I noticed some cultural diversity problems in the school	9	32
8	School has a good relationship with local and other cultural institutions	37	4
9	I have seen school classroom environments with instruction that appeared to be intercultural	28	13
10	School organizes trips to places with different cultural environment	38	3

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Part A: The main result of the questionnaire is that the majority of the school teachers can be defined as international teachers. It means that they are aware of the intercultural educational and intercultural awareness. Although some local teachers did not teach foreign countries, they are also familiar with the intercultural education after working such an atmosphere. However, they do not feel very comfortable teaching in culturally different classrooms and would like to teach in their own cultural schools.

Moreover, majority of the teachers are confident that they can develop and improve themselves when they have new students coming from different cultures. It is very important for a teacher to be sure himself/herself for such a situation. It is important that teachers are aware of value of intercultural education and they think that intercultural education can help for world peace and understanding to each other.

Part B: The result of the questionnaire shows that almost all teachers think that school is aware of importance of intercultural education so school gives importance to the intercultural understanding. This is very vital for an international school especially such a school having students from very different parts of the world. The school organizes some activities frequently that encourage the intercultural understanding and environment in the classroom. Moreover, more than half of the teachers have the possibility to express their own cultures in some extra-curricular activities.

6. CONCLUSION

This survey shows that intercultural education is very important in an international school. The school that I searched about intercultural education and intercultural understanding is very familiar and aware of this concept. The first part of the questionnaire showed me that teachers are experienced teaching in an international school even though some of them did not teach two or more countries. It is



an important conclusion that teaching in different countries is not necessarily needed to be an experienced, international minded teacher. If a teacher teaches several years in a real international school, s/he can manage how to teach in a classroom having very different students from very different countries.

Moreover, all teachers are aware of importance of intercultural education for peace of the world and understanding of people from different cultures. I think this is the most important conclusion of the survey. Understanding each other is the main problem of today's world. If we, as teachers, can teach how to understand the people from other cultures, religions, or colours, to our students as the adults of the future, we can expect less problems and more peace in the world.

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