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Who they are and where they are going? : a pattern of the Roma cultural communication

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WHO THEY ARE AND WHERE THEY ARE GOING? A PATTERN OF THE ROMA CULTURAL COMMUNUICATION

INTRODUCTION

Out of various theoretical starting points, we are most of all interested in multicultural education as a practical educational activity. The factor of the influence of different cultures enters various forms of educational processes and it has an impact on the results of those processes. Multicultural education can also be viewed as a complex of educational approaches to tolerance, as well as supporting social conscience of the pupils. Nowadays, the need to support processes of social and cultural inclusion is under discussion, which represents a higher level of removing inequalities. Inclusion with the Roma means creating such free environment, where nobody has to accommodate, because difference is accepted. One of the most important targets is creating optimal conditions for school inclusion, followed by social inclusion. Inclusion is a culture of life, through which a social process, especially that of socialization changes, is going, being realized via total content and process change. It represents a fundamental change of people's thinking, their view of life and world, coexistence of people within society. The introduction of inclusive strategies on all levels of formal education belongs among essential ideas.

BASAL PERSONALITY OF A ROMA

The concept of basal personality of a Roma means creation of first early experiences of a child, who is formed within socialization and it represents psychological foundation of the child's behavior. To understand the formation process of basal personality of a Roma, it is necessary to clarify the values of a Roma family and Roma ethnic.

Education in every family is, above all, carried out through the role models of the adults, the parents, their behavior, their relationships, conversations about everyday issues or vital ones, and realization of educational, cultural, leisure and work activities in the family as well as outside the family. The power of the parents' role model depends on seriousness and maturity of their personalities and on their mutual love. Early age of partners at the time of starting their life together



can be a disadvantage for maturity and quality of their educational impact on their own children. Openness of parents for discussions with children depends on their wisdom and life experiences (Šarníková, G., 2008).

The quality of a Roma child's relationship to school, to education, depends on the relationship of the parents to the value of education. Education through work experience has the best chances in Roma families (Krupová, I., 2010). In numerous Roma families, it is a common practice that the youngest children are looked after by their elder siblings.

A Roma family is typically very cohesive, including wider kinship, where relational bonds are strong enough. A large family offers all the knowledge that is needed to survive within the community; this is how the older members instruct the younger members of the family.

In the Roma community, special care and attention is given to first-born children, especially if the child is a son. If a son is born in a Roma family, it means strength and power for the clan. The world of the children merges that of the adults. Children learn through imitation; when doing housework, a boy is always with his father and a girl always with her mother. Children are very fixed to their parents, they learn a lot from them through imitation. Professions in families are inherited from fathers to sons, especially in musical families or in families where father worked in traditional crafts like a smith or a bricklayer.

People from majority community are often amazed by the fact that small Roma girls carry out activities which in majority community are done by adult women (housework, cooking, washing). But they are never dependent in questions of decision making, the elderly always take decisions for them. Intentionality of education, as well as ethical assessment, are almost absent, children are rarely punished. Education and educational trespasses control is a matter of entire community.

MODAL PERSONALITY OF A ROMA

Is characterized by typical features of the culture of the society. This personality is, in fact, a representative of this culture. They are the schemes of conduct, patterns of behavior, how to deal with individual situations (manners, customs). Culture and arts of the Roma reflect their spiritual world. The Roma are naturally versatily artistically talented, gifted with the ability to sense arts with extraordinary sensitivity. Their major strengths are literature, fine arts, music, as well as theater. Many of us have experienced the power of the Roma fairy tales and ballads. You can find good quality woodcarvers, portraitists, sculptors or potters. Artworks of the Roma children are interesting, they have a specific view of the world. A strong expression, energy, spontaneity – these are characteristics of the Roma music. The Roma are talented musicians (first violinists).

Talent for dance, music, literature or fine arts. These are the gifts given to the Roma. On the other hand, sometimes the Roma feel that their culture is rejected.



They isolate themselves from the world and present their amazing dancing, singing, music only inside their own communities (Kusín, V., Vanková, K., Odlerová, E., 2006).

EDUCATION OF THE ROMA

There was uniformity of the entire Slovak school system before 1989 in the area of elementary and secondary schools and universities. The curricula, contents of education, demands of school were created for an average pupil of the majority community. There was no space for variety (religious, cultural, national or ethnical). The Roma were, under the pressure of the policy of assimilation, forced to adapt to majority, while the identity of neither children nor their parents was respected. School, as an intermediary of culture of the society which an individual is a part of, must enable all its members development of the fundamentals of their own culture. The development of the culture is preceded by its understanding, which is why innovation of education is important. The new conception created conditions for complementing the content and implementation of cultural elements. The implemented elements should be based on the things, phenomena and environment of a pupil.

In education as a cultivation of the pupil's personality (Akimjaková, B., Tarajčáková, E., 2009;), especially through their own culture, we have to emphasize the curriculum (content of education) and education processes (procedures and strategies) and on the climate as a core of school culture (Krupová, I., 2007/2008). Because, from didactic point of view, creation and implementation of current content of education is influenced by:

- a) *Local culture.* The location where a school is situated is characterized by certain culture. Individual school work under different conditions; local conditions of natural and cultural character can be one of major sources of enriching and updating the content of education.
- b) *Culture of families which the pupils come from.* Prevailing proportion of pupils as for classes, signs of certain cultural influences, especially culture of the pupil's family. The criterion is the indicators made up of features like social origin, financial background, origin of pupils' families, religion and education of the parents. The more the culture of the family and that of the school correlate, the easier the task of the school and the smaller the stress of the pupil are. If the culture is different, it is important that it is accepted by the school. If school ignores culture of the family, it results in the child feeling downgraded. Social manners (communication rituals) of the pupils as members of the school community are also significant.
- c) *Culture of the school.* Specific qualities of a particular school's culture are influenced by factors like the history of the school, relevant events and traditions.



PERFORMANCE STANDARDS OF THE ROMA

I will again stick to the problem which I am describing. It is the essence and meaning of education in this minority, taking the wider picture into consideration.

Undoubtedly, one of most essential problems of this group is their education. They say that the more educated Roma we will have, the fewer problems will appear and majority society will respect them as an ethnic, not only as individuals. The Roma today do not understand the link between education and economic and social success. They do not trust school. But school belongs among important socialization factors which form the personality of a child. Creating a positive relationship to school of both Roma pupils and their parents is a guarantee of their change of attitude to education and learning and thus better inclusion in society.

For Roma children, entering a school is a significant milestone in their life. But a Roma child at school finds herself/himself in a world which is strange to them. In most cases, their command of the official language is not perfect, different customs and attitudes, different values and things which they do not know are presented to them. They are coming from a different environment, because Roma children see their family as a place where nobody hurts them, nobody rebukes or limits them, they are offered freedom. Because of this unlimited love of the Roma for their children the Roma children are more sensitive. It shows up when they come to school and they are compliant, helpful, snuggly and if the conditions are proper, they also enjoy learning and going to school. The contact between the environment where they grew up and where they live, and school is more visible in higher grades, when their results usually get worse, they start losing interest in school and learning, they become ruder, more rebellious. This change of relationship to school and teachers is closely connected to the onset of puberty, growing demands at school, but also with the experience they get at school in contact with their peers. In emotional area, two extremes are typical for Roma children. They are either neurotic, unstable, fearful or hot-tempered, aggressive. Generally, the Roma children are more lively, which means they are noisier, find it more difficult to concentrate on schoolwork, to adapt to social norms and demands on their conduct in the school environment. Those are different from the norms, customs and traditions which they bring from their home environment.

Of course, there are differences between individual Roma children. The Roma children who grow up among other population or come from mixed marriages are different from those who grow up in Roma settlements, which are usually situated on the peripheries of towns and villages. Situation of those children is especially difficult, because they have not mastered basic knowledge and skills, do not speak the official language, do not have elementary hygiene habits, social and work habits, which are an inevitable prerequisite for a successful inclusion in the school environment, which is why in most cases they fail at school from the very beginning. This failure is not a result of mental insufficiency, but rather of lack of stimuli needed for normal development in their early childhood. Under proper



conditions, most of the Roma children have a chance to approach the norm of intellectual development level. (Říčan, P., 1998)

From this point of view, the reform of our school system can help the Roma pupils, as it accepts a wider space for creativity, spontaneity, demands which are adapted to children's abilities. When working with the Roma pupils, besides developing cognitive functions, non-cognitive functions development is also emphasized (emotions, motivation, socialization, values and creativity).

ADAPTATION OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION TO THE NORMS OF A ROMA

It is always needed to respect the factors which influence the entire process of communication with a Roma. If the communication is to be efficient and successful, it is important to take numerous factors, which have an impact on it, into consideration. They are:

- a) Abilities of a communicator include abilities of the sender to clearly and aptly communicate the message, with regard to age and understanding of the recipient, as well as his active use of communication skills e.g. the ability to actively listen (a Roma parent to a teacher, a teacher to a Roma pupil), to respect the pupil and his divergences connected to his culture, which he is a representative of, to ask properly formulated questions, to try to understand non-verbal communication.
- b) Sensibility of a recipient is his ability to not only understand the information correctly, but also subjectively process and interpret it properly. In communication, the same information can be understood differently by different participants.
- c) Personal space is the space which people create around themselves. If this space is insensitively disturbed in the course of communication, it can influence its quality.
- d) Territoriality represents space and things which an individual considers his ownership.
- e) Status and relationships of communicators also influence the course of communication. For instance, the character of communication between a teacher and a pupil is different, depending on the style of teaching.
- f) Time and character of events preceding the communication given. For example, poor social level of the family etc.
- g) Environment – material and technical equipment at school and home. It is important that an individual feels comfortable.
- h) Attitudes are important for efficient communication. If respect, attention, frankness, acceptance are shown, it is a positive attitude. If superiority, reservedness and coldness prevail, it is a negative attitude.
- i) Emotions and self-respect also have an impact on the ability to interpret messages. Level of self-respect influences standard of communication.



SELECTION OF A ROMA COMMUNICATOR

We choose a Roma communicator whose communication inside this group is the most efficient. As for the problem which I was solving with the Roma population, the Roma assistant can be our communicator. I will just remind that we are dealing with the problem of education of this ethnic. In this context it is important to remind, that a Roma pupil is not motivated and does not consider education very important. They do not associate material sufficiency and success with education. They cannot concentrate for longer periods of time. One of frequent complaints of Roma pupils about school is that they have to sit silently. But sometimes the real reason is that the children come to school hungry. This is why they can be aggressive, which might be a reason of conflicts not only with the teacher but with classmates, too. As for time perception of the Roma pupils, it is most important for them to complete the given task as fast as possible. They do not feel responsibility for assigned work. They have problems with time perception, but they are really good at perception of space and movement. They keep distance from the curriculum. They are not interested in things which are not from real life or abstract things. Their main problem is mathematical concepts. If something refers to themselves and their lives, they get interested and it is easier for them to remember. The biggest problem with the Roma is their irregular school attendance. Another problem is the fact that they do not do their homework, do not bring school supplies. Most of the Roma pupils say that nobody looks after them at home. The language of education is not their native language, which results in educational problems, especially at the beginning of school attendance. This is where the role of a Roma assistant becomes relevant as they can help their ethnic. A Roma assistant knows their character best and children accept him/her better as he/she is one of them. He/she knows their culture, customs, problems. They work directly in classes with a higher number of Roma children and follow the instructions of the teacher. Roma assistants should more and more intensely work with the parents of the Roma pupils. It is important to explain the importance of education for a better future of their children. The time when the Roma complete compulsory school education and continue to get some qualification is vital in the Roma parents and youth education. Many of them do not have conditions at home so it is necessary that the teachers and assistants motivate them (Akimjaková, B., 2009).

It has to be emphasized that it is necessary to remember the main reason of developing the partnership of a teacher and a Roma parent in communication with the Roma ethnic. It is to help the children reach achievements at school and in their future life. At the very moment when the community of parents, teachers and pupils is seen as partnership, the community starts to be pupil-oriented which is vital for success of the process of education.

FAMILIARIZATION WITH THE MOST COMMON ACTIVITIES OF THE ROMA

Their common activities are linked to their value system. Their highest priority is freedom. They are strongly connected to their past and their ancestors. They



treasure family more than anything else. Roma identity consists of so called Romipen (Roma pride), which is a complex of values theoretically common to all the Roma. An important part of Romipen is chachipen – true, right, justice, reality. But they understand these terms differently. There is a strong principle of solidarity within the slogan „I have today, you will have tomorrow.” This is why the Roma do not expect that they will have to give back a thing which they borrowed and in the settlements ownership is collective, so everybody can take what they need. Generally speaking, the Roma respect the following values:

- family, community,
- health,
- equality,
- material values, social securities,
- work,
- pleasant, comfortable life.

Activities, which the Roma spend most of their time doing, are based on those values. To focus on the problem of education, I have to return to mothers, who are responsible for running the family and bringing up the children. But a Roma mother approaches bringing up a child differently from a non-Roma one. The psycho-cognitive component of education is often missing, a Roma mother does not speak with a child about things which they are interested in, does not read fairytales to them and does not teach them to get to know the world around them. She leaves everything to its natural course. The following two factors are considered to be main reasons of failures in education of the Roma:

- a long-term vision for the future how the Roma should change themselves
- courage to give the means to the most important point of change.

First of all, it is necessary to forge the humanistic principles of education and to complete them with the specifics of the Roma ethnic. The Roma specifics have to be accepted, not suppressed. A Roma child comes to school from a specific environment of a Roma family. It is a dominant socialization factor in a Roma child's life, which is an important starting point for analysis of a Roma child behavior at school. As I mentioned, in the Roma community, common ownership still exists. This fact causes problems to the Roma children at school when they borrow something without giving it back. The environment of the Roma family is not stimulating enough. Parents do not get the children ready for school, the importance of education is underestimated. The result of insufficient family education is unfavorable personal development of a child. Educational function of a Roma family usually fails.

Inner cooperation between individual groups of the Roma is interconnected. Relationships between individual members of a group, as well as between groups, were sufficiently described in detail in previous sections.



To choose a central man inside the group and, with him, define forms of communication. A Roma assistant, who will work in the Roma community, in the center with mothers as one of them, will become a central person in solving the problem of education the Roma children. In the first phase, the Roma assistant will emphasize the importance of education of the children for their future. It will be a long-term education process which should lead to understanding the importance of education. I also see work of the Roma assistant with the mothers, teaching them how to help children do their homework, permanently encourage their children and inspiring them to learn, as a long-term process (Kusín, V., Vanková, K., Odlerová, E., 2006).

To assess effectiveness of our measures as a result of the chosen ways of cultural communication. This step is applicable as a research in the community of Roma mothers. I would suggest applying several times in certain time intervals. Then, based on our findings, it would be possible to say what role was played by the Roma assistant, who we focused attention on, as on a contact person who can help solve the given problem.

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**SUMMARY:****Who they are and where they are going? A pattern of the Roma cultural communication**

Education of the Roma pupils has got its specifics. The problem of school attendance of the Roma pupils starts at their parents. If we want to solve educational problems of the Roma, we have to, above all, change their parents' thinking and motivate them, as they do not see the importance of education.

Key words: inclusion, multicultural education, education, Roma.

STRESZCZENIE:**Kim są i dokąd zmierzają? Wzór komunikacji kulturowej Romów**

Edukacja i wychowanie uczniów romskich ma swoje specyficzne cechy. Problem uczniów romskich z uczęszczaniem na lekcje zaczyna się od rodziców. Jeżeli chcemy rozwiązywać problemy edukacyjne Romów, powinniśmy przede wszystkim zmienić myślenie oraz umotywić rodziców, którzy nie widzą sensu w edukacji.

Słowa kluczowe: motywacja włączenie, edukacja wielokulturowa, edukacja, Romowie.

