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## **Folklore as Means of Inclusion of Ethnic Minority Children. Theory of education**

### **Folklor jako narzędzie włączania dzieci z mniejszości etnicznych. Teoria edukacji**

**Abstract:** The inclusion of children from Roma communities is a challenge that a number of countries are facing. The present article describes successful Bulgarian models for social and pedagogical inclusion of children from the Roma ethnic group through folklore, developed by informal organizations in the country with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria.

**Keywords:** social inclusion, inclusive education, folklore, Roma children education

**Streszczenie:** Włączenie dzieci ze społeczności romskich jest wyzwaniem, przed którym stoi wiele krajów. W tym artykule opisano udane bułgarskie modele społecznego i pedagogicznego włączenia dzieci z etnicznej grupy Romów poprzez folklor, opracowane przez nieformalne organizacje i szkoły w kraju we współpracy z Ministerstwem Edukacji i Nauki Republiki Bułgarii.

**Słowa kluczowe:** integracja społeczna, edukacja, folklor, edukacja Romów

Bulgaria is a small European country with rich history and cultural traditions. Often, its location is described as "crossroads between East and West". The population of the country includes both ethnic Bulgarians and many ethnic communities. Some of them are Turkish, Roma, Armenian, Jewish, Wallachian, Gagauz and other ethnic communities. Part of them have successfully integrated in the society and in the life of the country, while in others - the processes of integration are still ongoing.

"Among the poorest and-most prominent risk groups" in the Republic of Bulgaria "are the members of ethnic minorities - mostly Roma", which are most often identified as the poorest and most vulnerable, socially excluded and socially – isolated categories and groups. They are predominantly well below the officially adopted "poverty threshold"; most of them, if they work at all, have low-status and low-paid work. This is the ethnic group with the highest share of the long-term unemployed, and the economically inactive,

living mostly in large-scale and multi-family households in poor living conditions" [Tilkidjiev, Milenkova, Petkova, Mileva, 2009, p. 12]

What is more, there is another problem that concerns the future state of this ethnicity and the state. According to the 1989 national statistics information "... every year between 10 000 and 33 000 children, mainly Roma, drop out of school, without taking in consideration those who are supposed to go to school, but are not even enrolled in the first grade... According to official data of the Ministry of Education (MES) for 2004, almost 15 000 children left school and nearly all of them being Roma" [Tilkidjiev, Milenkova, Petkova, Mileva. 2009, pp. 9-10].

This problem is not typical of Bulgaria only: "quite similar are the problems of the young Roma, dropping out of school in Romania, Serbia and Macedonia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Ukraine and everywhere, where the Roma have a significant contingent" [Tilkidjiev, Milenkova, Petkova, Mileva. 2009, pp. 11-11].

Those results logically led to the question: "What kind of citizens are formed by this dramatically..., increasing, impressive large-scale contingent of young people, that are soon to reach economically active age?" [ibid.].

The steps towards solving Roma minority problems undertaken by the Bulgarian state were included in the National Action Plan under the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 and supported by a number of non-governmental organizations. Among the main tasks of the initiative are guaranteeing the right to equal access to quality education for children and students from the Roma ethnic minority; preserving and developing the cultural identity of children and students from the Roma ethnic minority, creating prerequisites for successful socialization of Roma children, students and young people; making cultural diversity a source and a factor for mutual acquaintance and spiritual development of adolescents and creating an atmosphere of mutual respect, tolerance and understanding; creating a suitable socio-psychological climate to foster the educational integration of children and students from the Roma minority [National Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015].

State efforts in this direction are continuing to date through legislative changes (one of which is the Inclusive Education Ordinance of the Ministry of Education and Science) as well as through partnerships of state institutions in a number of initiatives and projects, implemented in the non-governmental sector.

The Ordinance on Inclusive Education of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria was updated several times. According to recent changes, enacted since 27.10.2017, inclusive education is defined as "a

process of awareness, acceptance and support of the individuality of each child or pupil and the variety of needs of all children and students through activation and inclusion of resources, aimed at removing obstacles to learning and learning and creating opportunities for the development and participation of children and pupils in all aspects of community life" [Ordinance on the Inclusive Education of the Ministry of Education and Science, Art. 3]. The Ordinance provides for the support of the personal development of children in kindergartens, schools and centers of personal development through their inclusion in a wide range of activities, whereby each child can develop his / her abilities. Part of the activities that take place in the school institution are aimed at assisting the students in Bulgarian language learning, as well as in enhancing their achievement in other educational disciplines. Other activities are aimed at meeting the interests of children in areas such as sports and arts.

For this purpose, the Ministry of Education and Science develops and implements the project "Your Hour", whereby all students have the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities that take place in extracurricular activities in Bulgarian schools. These include activities related to the study of Bulgarian folklore and traditions. They can include children from all ethnic communities.

In 2002-2003, the Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance "Amalipe" launched the program "Roma Folklore in the Bulgarian School", financed by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Open Society Foundation. With its help were created "30 groups of Folklore of Ethnicity in Bulgaria – Roma Folklore in 13 schools from Veliko Tarnovo district and 1 school from Sofia" [Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance Amalipe, Folklore of Ethnicity in Bulgaria]. According to the authors of the program, "one of the main objectives" of this elective discipline in schools is "to create an efficient model for educating ethnic tolerance, pride and friendship, as well as attracting and retaining children in school through the study of Roma folklore" (ibid.) to "help the Bulgarian and Turkish children to overcome their prejudices against their Roma classmates or to protect them from such" [Nakov, Nunev, Krumova 2004, p. 8].

The project includes activities aimed at overcoming the "reasons for the high percentage of children not admitted and dropped out of the school system" and a change in the views of the Roma, according to which "the school still remains an official and a foreign institution". The desire of the Center is for the children to "experience something familiar in it" and to introduce the Roma folklore into the curriculum to change the image of the Roma (children, but also their parents) to show that school is really a place for everyone.

Seeing part of their traditions in the classroom and textbooks, the Roma child will start to feel the school as a bit less "alien" [ibid].

On the other hand, the study of "Ethnic Folklore in Bulgaria – Roma Folklore" enables other children who are not from the Roma community to "get to know the rich folkloric world of the Roma, to see the similarities between the Roma folklore and the folklore of the other ethnicities". As well as – to make sure that the tales, the traditions and the songs of the Roma talk about the same things – righteousness, love and happiness. The hopes of the authors of the project are the Roma folklore to "help all children to realize the significance of the common elements in the traditions and culture of different ethnic groups in Bulgaria" and to "strengthen their sense of belonging to the Bulgarian nation".

In 2010, Center "Amalipe" started the project "Every Child Can Be Excellent", which includes more than 200 schools in the country. Since 2014, the center has launched a "Ready-for-School" project, which aims to "encourage the full inclusion of children from disadvantaged families in the early education process" [ibid.].

It can be seen that efforts to integrate children from the Roma ethnic group into the school, albeit slowly, see progress as clearly demonstrated by the results of such projects: for 2015/2016, the drop-out rate ... is 0.78% (282 students), which is well below the average for the country. In 109 schools there is not a single dropout. Both "increased school success" and "increased secondary school attendance to over 80% of middle school graduates" are reported [Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance, Roma Education in Bulgaria – resource site].

Looking for opportunities for inclusion of children, however, the attention of educators and scientists focuses mainly on the conditions of inclusion of children in the school environment, ignoring the possibilities of the social environment. Due to its essence and multifactorial nature it has its place and importance in overcoming obstacles to learning and in "creating opportunities for development and participation of children and pupils in all aspects of community life" [Ordinance MES's inclusive education].

A special place in the community and in the life of pupils/children have out-of-school student communities that are "organized outside of the school institution... and are not binding". The "participants have the right to free choice of types and forms of activity according to the individual and age-related interests, abilities and needs" [Rangelova, Em. - 2016, p. 463]. Out-of-school student communities are diverse - depending on the "predominant content of the type of activity" can be "scientific-technical, artistic-aesthetic, labor,

sports, tourism, etc... designed not only for the most capable and talented students" [ibid., p. 463].

Among extra-curricular pedagogical forms for children in the Republic of Bulgaria, popular and successful are, those who teach Bulgarian dance, song, instrumental folklore and Bulgarian crafts.

They have proved their abilities to achieve a variety of pedagogical and social goals such as: they form qualities and abilities to accept, transmit, preserve, enrich and defend the traditions and culture of the Bulgarians; form a positive attitude towards their culture; promote a narrative, aesthetic and physical upbringing; build a competitive spirit and qualities to overcome competition, build skills for community life, etc.

Unfortunately, the out-of-school folklore creative activities of the other ethnic communities, including Roma, are very few. According to D. Melamed, Director of the Jewish Cultural Center in Sofia "by means of the children's activities in the center, we succeed in reviving Jewish traditions, which our parents did not hand down to us because of the prohibitions on the practice of religion at the time of socialism. Through the celebrating of holidays in the community, with our traditional songs and dances, and with theatrical recreation of moments of Jewish history presented by children, we are attracting the older generation and strive for reviving the community and building a stable ethnic consciousness of children, and their parents and grandparents" [D. Melamed, Interview, 30.11.2017].

Similar activities exist in the regions where large ethnic communities live. These are, for example, the Turkish folklore ensembles in Ardino; group for Turkish folk songs – village of Rouyno, municipality of Dulovo; The group for Turkish folklore at the community center in the village of Rhodhovtsi, Sevlievo; Folklore group for local Turkish songs from the village of Stremtsi, Kardzhali and others. In the big cities, folklore activities are performed by the Armenian dance group "Guayane Marashilian" – Varna; Armenian dance ensemble Nairi – Sofia and others.

The activity of most of them mainly covers children and young people from the relevant community only. They rarely participate in intercultural educational projects and are not popular as Bulgarian out-of-school folklore pedagogical forms, which often involve children from other ethnic communities. This kind of conservatism has both positive aspects (preserving ethnic traditions and culture, maintaining ethnic self-awareness), as well as shortcomings (impossibility of mutual acquaintance and overcoming prejudices in public consciousness). It is well known that the best way of peaceful coexi-

stence is to know the "other", "the different", and the most direct way – knowledge about their culture and traditions.

For that reason the popularization of the folk creative activities of ethnic minorities and their transformation into an attractive alternative for the free time would help to achieve a number of pedagogical and social goals, including social inclusion and convergence of young people and non-aggressive intercultural communication.

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