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## **Intercultural dimension of the upbringing and educational contents through extracurricular activities**

### **Abstract**

Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) is a multiethnic and multicultural society. The ethnic heterogeneous structure of the population is an indicator that the educational priority should be to support constructive initiatives to promote the idea of intercultural education, as a basic link for cooperation and communication between different ethnic communities. The educational system of the RNM is facing a great challenge in developing prerequisites for intercultural education as a planned and long-term upbringing and educational approach.

Starting from the need for advancing the multiethnic and multicultural reality in the country, the Nansen Dialogue Centre Skopje prepared the Conception for Intercultural Education of the RNM. As an official state development document, it provides an opportunity for fostering of upbringing and educational process in direction of improvement of communication, cooperation and understanding between members of different ethnic communities in upbringing and educational institutions. As a philosophy and approach, the intercultural education should be a key tool in the process of initiation and support for building interactive and harmonious relationships in the community.

Implementation and coordination of a large number of extracurricular activities may further enrich the quality of intercultural school life. The Nansen model for intercultural education is an educational model in RNM that enables successful integration of students, parents and teachers of different ethnic communities through a modern upbringing and educational process, based on a variety of intercultural extracurricular and project activities.

**Keywords:** *Intercultural Education, extracurricular activities, Nansen Model for Intercultural Education*

### **1. Introduction**

As a philosophy and approach, the intercultural education should be a key tool in the process of initiation and support for building interactive

and harmonious relationships in the community.

Due to a frequent identification, it is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of

multicultural and intercultural society / education. Multiculturalism and interculturalism are two types of social concepts. Major qualitative difference between these two concepts is in the extent of interaction between different cultural groups within a single social community.

Multiculturalism refers to the existence of several different cultures in a single geographical area, which are not in a compulsory, every day and permanent natural touch and interaction. Interculturalism, in turn, implies open interaction relations and connections between different cultural and national groups that believe in and promote values such as tolerance, mutual respect, equality and open communication.

Intercultural education should be organized in order to realize the multifaceted task, i.e. education for empathy, solidarity, intercultural respect and a non-nationalistic way of thinking. It is education for unity, solidarity, respect, mutual tolerance, assistance, trust and other universal human values. (Conception for Intercultural Education, 2016).

That is why intercultural education should be observed as a need of our society, because it should recognize the possibility of dealing with the challenge in finding the optimal relation between cultural diversity and social cohesion. The concept of intercultural education provides clear guidelines and solutions for possible transformation and upgrade of the upbringing

and educational system in the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) with intercultural orientation and values.

It should be emphasized that - through the set global goals and tasks - intercultural education, both as an educational policy and upbringing and educational approach, should have a comprehensive and positive effect and transform all the aspects of upbringing and educational activities, such as: working contents,

- forms, methods and techniques of teaching and learning, textbooks,
- materials and other teaching aids,
- extracurricular activities,
- competencies of upbringing and educational entities,
- ambient in upbringing and educational institutions, and
- connection of upbringing and educational institutions with the wider community.

## **2. Intercultural education from the aspect of the extracurricular activities**

Implementation and coordination of a large number of extracurricular activities may further enrich the quality of intercultural school life. Various extracurricular activities and project school activities should be, above all, a reflection of universal human values in a direction of supporting intercultural dialogue,

cooperation and coexistence; as well as the students' interests, their affinities and potentials, but primarily promoting the educational function, socialization and training for successful group of pair cooperation, as well as independent research and discovery. Schools should support the process of direct functioning of the numerous extracurricular activities, based on various student sections and clubs.

Their contents may derive from a variety of areas such as fine arts, film, photography, music, theater, graphic design, environment, education for peace, sports, urban culture, civic education, science and technology, etc. When designing the program frameworks of extracurricular content, emphasis should be placed on activities of: - intercultural, - bilingual character, - maintaining the continuity, regular dynamics and succession in their organization as an important and upgraded chain of the regular upbringing and educational process.

This chain will help in improving the quality of a regular teaching process, but also in maintaining the students' active, positive and motivated attitude towards the learning process. Above all, the project and extracurricular activities should contribute to a positive promotion of ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic, gender, socio-economic and developmental differences.

The global goals of extracurricular and project activities of intercultural character are directed towards:

- deepening of constructive collaborative relations between upbringing and educational entities of different ethnic origin,
- sensitization for respect of differences,
- building strategies for overcoming stereotypes and prejudices in school environments,
- encouraging a tolerant attitude towards the differences of social, ethnic and cultural character,
- enabling constructive cooperation, assistance and mutual support,
- developing a positive emotional climate within the heterogeneous groups,
- supporting the interest and curiosity about the language of the "other",
- strengthening the interaction, cooperation and trust between the school and families,
- developing students' talents and abilities depending on their individual potentials,
- supporting curiosity, originality and creative potentials,
- developing logical, flexible, divergent and critical thinking (Conception for Intercultural Education, 2016).

Extracurricular activities with an intercultural preference can be successfully organized in both monoethnic and multiethnic schools, thanks to a different approach. The monoethnic schools should support the realization of

contents that refer to the promotion of universal, human values and learning about different cultures, traditions, customs, languages, etc. The focus in multiethnic, multilingual schools should be placed on improving the bilingual, tandem planning, organizing and performing extracurricular and project school activities, with equal inclusion of students from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Project school activities, in particular, offer opportunities for networking of student and teaching teams at local and regional level during the implementation of long-term research project activities, upgraded with a multilingual approach, remote learning, interaction and cooperation.

### **3. Good practices and experiences – the Nansen model for intercultural education**

The Nansen model for intercultural education (NMIE) is an educational model in RNM that enables successful integration of students, parents and teachers of different ethnic communities through a modern upbringing and educational process, based on a variety of intercultural extracurricular and project activities. NMIE is a model of education that nurtures, encourages and integrates multi-ethnic values and bilingualism, while promoting and supporting the cooperation between students, teachers and parents based on respect for differences, thus building a cohesive community.

The model was developed and implemented in 2007 after two years of work on projects for dialogue and reconciliation in post-conflict and divided societies in Macedonia. Since then, the model has been successfully implemented in several selected primary and secondary schools across municipalities in Macedonia and the region, showing excellent results. It is based on extracurricular activities, i.e. on several types of student school clubs, implemented bilingually, by teacher tandem, with groups of students of mixed ethnic composition. Extracurricular activities are a bridge that enables the children, students from different ethnic communities to have an opportunity and space for mutual, everyday meetings, spontaneous and free communication, cooperation, assistance, mutual learning and socializing.

When preparing extracurricular activities, it is necessary to keep in mind the following questions: What kind of activities would students want to perform every day? How to organize activities in order to maintain the students' attention and motivation? Which areas arouse students' interest and curiosity? Knowing that the regular teaching process always lacks a space for game and research activities and projects, and in order to overcome this situation in the classrooms, extracurricular activities immediately proved as an excellent choice and form for organizing rich, motivating and creative game activities to

gain students' interest and to nourish their motivation. Therefore, various game situations are the basis for smooth and direct cooperation, bringing together and connecting students of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The teacher tandems determine the schedule of extracurricular activities, although it is important to note that it is flexible and that it is always necessary to meet the current school developments or more important events at the local or municipal level.

Extracurricular activities should be in a function of the development of the student talents, skills, abilities, as well as in the direction of strengthening of their self-esteem, a positive self-image and a positive attitude towards the school.

#### **4. The role of students / teachers / parents**

Students and parents are the most important partners and supporters of the NMIE. Particular attention is paid to the relation to the students as an equal factor in shaping and creating both the regular teaching process and the extracurricular contents. When drafting extracurricular content, it is necessary to respect the previously acquired knowledge, wishes, interests, and abilities of the students. Therefore, the extracurricular contents should continuously promote the individualized approach, where the complexity of the tasks will correspond to the student's developmental

abilities, but at the same time they will also have a small "dose" of contents that will be in the function of encouraging development, i.e. will be in the sphere of a future development. Direct realization of the intercultural extracurricular contents clearly leads to the conclusion that the daily planned contents (within all the school clubs) are designed and presented at different levels of complexity, in order to allow all students to independently accomplish the desired final product, a result.

The responsibility of the teachers is to recognize the speed and tempo of each of the students to accomplish the set goal, while not being discouraged or demotivated due to the complexity of the current activities.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Outcomes of the extracurricular activities in the NMIE:

- improved and enriched didactic component in all groups, knowledge upgrade, acquiring skills required for successful approach to other cultures, prevalence of interactive activities and group work, individualized approach to each student and individual progress; improved and mastered techniques for active and independent learning of students;
- very high index of group cohesion, compactness in all student groups, confirmed by the absence of any possible risk of interethnic tensions and conflicts within the ethnically mixed groups;

- continuous advancement of the inclusive component, i.e. permanent inclusion and enabling of the students with special needs for active participation in extracurricular activities, through which they are accepted as equal members of the group. Their progress takes place at two levels - the plan of socialization and the plan of learning;
- overcoming barriers for learning of the language of “other”, successfully achieved cultural dialogue between students from different ethnic communities, eliminated educational exclusion of students due to the language barriers;
- multiethnic character of the groups, visually presented through effective intercultural design of the classroom space, designed by the students;
- improved outcomes in the regular teaching process, due to the intercultural extracurricular activities;
- developed students’ skills for constructive conflict resolution, critical thinking, flexible approach to problem situations, competence for constructive approach to research situations both within the extracurricular activities and the regular teaching process;
- achieved dynamic and multidirectional communication without language barriers, enriched with skills for non-verbal communication and understanding;
- developed personal and social competence of students required for life in a real multi-ethnic context (school, local community) ([www.nmie.org](http://www.nmie.org)).

## REFERENCES

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[www.nmie.org](http://www.nmie.org)