

FACILITIES OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN KINDERGARTENS

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A kindergarten working in spirit of multicultural education provides equal chances to children from different subcultures. The principles of kindergartens are love, esteem and accepting childish personalities. In fact kindergartens are often not open to host children with disabilities.

Little ones can understand their disabled mates only if they are exposed to their different way of life. Integration of children belonging to minorities, speaking different languages or having a different color of skin can lead to difficulties. This problem can only be solved by helping children to get to know the culture, habits and thoughts of their mates, and be a part of their different context.

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Multicultural Education

The question of multicultural education is coming to the front in our country too with globalization. During the past couple of years it has become part of the education domains, therefore the approach pointing out the interactions with other cultures, societies or groups in society has gained importance in school education too. Kindergarten education, however, should get an important role in forming this new approach, as multicultural societies are characteristic worldwide and thus makes it important to respect other cultures. The reason behind conflicts is usually the lack of appreciation and problems may arise from a false interpretation of habits of ethnic groups living next to each other. The need for peaceful coexistence is getting more and more important in our society, the primary condition of which is tolerance towards one another. Children have to learn how to accept difference at a very young age. People different than the average must be respected and helped. The development of information and communication channels broadened the world, and educational institutes as well as teachers must adapt to the new situation. Multicultural education has an important role in forming the new approach, which is not an activity, nor a subject, rather a pedagogical principle that contributes to people's view of the world.

In spite of the kindergarten being an important stage of lifetime socialization, the first practical steps are usually taken by the school. Multicultural education means more than getting disadvantaged children to catch up. It also includes social connections, handling inter-group affairs and cooperation. As a result of this global view multicultural education should already be a part of kindergarten education. The aim of multicultural education is learning the differences in cultural properties, a crucial assumption of which is discovering the cultural identity of one's own. Multicultural education however is not only knowing other cultures and

understanding subcultures but also accepting and helping people with abilities and aptitudes different from the average. It also includes differences due to age, social background and geographical locations (Nanszákné Cserfalvi, 2008).

The child becomes part of a family with his birth. His or her view is formed by the parents at first, and then by other relatives and friends. It can be asserted that in the case of small children the view of the world of the parents is dominant. The growing generation is affected by more and more sources from the beginning of kindergarten. Yet children with an ethno-centric approach can be found. They only accept the habits and norms of their family and everything else is considered negative. These children require increased attention as they might show aggressive behavior. These prejudices stem in the family. That is why not only the education of children is important but forming the parents' view as well.

The Multicultural Kindergarten

A kindergarten operating in the spirit of multicultural education is opened and hosting. It does not deny the right to go to kindergarten from children other than the average either. It provides equal rights to children belonging to different subcultures, sexes, ethnic and society groups or with different abilities during the everyday life and developmental activities of the kindergarten. The multicultural way of thinking comes through only if the children, the parents, the teachers and adults working in the kindergarten cooperate. They can create the opened atmosphere of the kindergarten together. An educational institution can only exhibit multicultural approach, if it pays attention to heterogeneity as well as children with different abilities and also puts it into practice (Torgyik, 2005).

When preparing their yearly plan, kindergarten teachers follow general educational and developmental principles. No individual plans are made, although the kids joining the group will have different abilities and skills even if they don't belong to the group of handicapped or mentally ill people. Every year the kindergarten activities should be adjusted to the needs, taking the nature of the group into consideration. Multicultural approach should also be present and the aim should be solving problems that are currently causing problems in the group.

The emphasis should be put on prevention. Prejudices should not be formed in an open, tolerant society. Conflicts should not turn into hatred, rather their creative solution could improve cohesion in the community. In the case when a non-native Hungarian arrives to the group, getting to know the differences between cultures must be brought up. If the children can learn why their fellow „strange” is, if we help them to find the value in being different, mockery and ostracism can be avoided.

A Review and Analysis of Kindergarten Education Programs

In my research 35 Educational Programs of kindergartens - operated by self-governments - were randomly selected and a structured interview with the kindergarten teachers was conducted. The average number of people working in kindergartens examined was 10.

The primary objective of the research was to find out whether multicultural education or a part of it appears in the programs.

After the initial review neither the notion of multicultural nor that of multicultural education was found in any of the programs. Based on the first result, however, it cannot be claimed that multicultural approach is not present in the kindergartens, since certain aspects of multicultural education can be found in the education activity of the kindergarten. The Basic Program of Kindergarten Education is supplemented by two sections that determine the basic principles of education of national, ethnic minorities and children with disabilities (Az Óvodai..., 1998:16-19).

These educational principles only have to be integrated into the respective educational program of the kindergarten if „they do education of national, ethnic minorities” or „education of children with disabilities of body, organs, speech” (Az Óvodai..., 1998:16-19). In reality this is part of the program of the kindergartens, but the principles only exist in theory. No suggestions were found for practical applicability and there is no methodology supplemental material either. From the interview with the kindergarten teachers it became obvious that it is up to the individual how they accept „other” children. There is no conscious, integrated developmental activity for children other than the average. In each kindergarten program there are details of how to develop children requiring special attention and to get those with linguistic disadvantages to catch up. In reality such children are not easily admitted, though sometimes it is impossible due to the kindergarten being already crowded or lacking the necessary equipment.

The biggest problem is not financial but the approach and the resistance of the parents. For a family bringing up a healthy child, it is natural to see the child improve day by day. The everyday struggle of the parents with a handicapped child is not taken into consideration. Healthy children can only understand their handicapped fellows if they can experience their way of life. Many parents fear this will cause a psychic injury, though things misunderstood are generally more dangerous as they can cause a permanent distress. If the small children receive an explanation appropriate for their age, they can be the biggest aid of their fellows.

It is very important to find a solution, even if the kindergarten is not specialized in educating children with special needs but only one such child enters the community. In such cases the „strange” child will more likely be excluded, the reaction of the others is what needs more attention.

Principles of Kindergarten-Education

The main principles of kindergarten education are accepting the child’s personality, love and appreciation. The teacher has to be aware of the child’s personality, habits and favorite games. The child has to be able to express his or her happiness or sorrow every day. The atmosphere of the kindergarten should be calm and open. These principles, which appear in every program, suggest that the multicultural atmosphere is present in the kindergartens in theory. Kindergarten teachers help individuals achieve development according to skill level possible, the problem lies within the ability of acceptance of the wider environment.

A primary condition of multicultural education is to know the culture of one’s own nation. Folklore traditions are generally better kept at institutes in smaller villages. This point of view is already in the background in kindergartens of cities. Such institutions put an emphasis on teaching foreign languages, group dance, music, drama as well as several other possibilities for children develop their skills, but simple, basic knowledge are neglected.

Keeping folklore traditions is only dealt with at Advent, Christmas and Easter. Getting to know the culture of other nations is not part of the kindergarten programs at all. Children in kindergartens of cities don't really know our own nations' traditions. At such kindergartens being Hungarian and belonging to the nation is only associated with 15 March. At places where the majority of people speak the language of the minority, Hungarian language and that of the minority are separately paid attention to. It is rarely possible for the children to get to know the habits, values and traditions of the children of another subculture, though it could be a very important step towards fighting prejudices.

Kindergarten Project Weeks against Forming Prejudices

Kindergarten-education can do a lot against prejudices, as stereotypes appear in children around the age of 5. A democratic atmosphere and special activities can prevent discrimination. Undesirable manners have to be prevented, thus creating a base for human solidarity. An accepting atmosphere without prejudices is the main condition of integration.

The integration of children speaking a different language or having a different color of skin is problematic. This can be dealt with if the children are exposed to the others' culture, traditions, and thoughts. Children are very sensitive from their birth on, and sympathize easily with the problems, distress, and happiness of their environment. This ability of theirs should be maintained and not killed.

The forming of multicultural approach should be started in the kindergarten, since prejudices can be prevented at a very young age. A very good opportunity is given by project weeks. Different programs can be organized on a certain topic, preferably getting the parents involved too. The project week should be carried out by the parents and children together, the program and activities being adjusted to the particular group. The multicultural approach of the children has to be formed in such a way that they become tolerant. They have to be taught to be able to treat handicapped children as if they had no problems at all and at the same time helping them in getting around, orientation, doing their jobs and taking care of them without their noticing it. The little ones can help kindergarten teachers a lot in their work and by a tolerant, helping approach they can make their handicapped fellows happy. Not only the children have to experience and be tolerant to being different but also the parents. It is very useful for the parents to listen to an expert in the field and take part in trainings.

Evening or weekend programs could serve as means for building and maintaining the relationship between the participants. The joint work and experience lead to mutual understanding. In the interviews the kindergarten teachers pointed out how difficult it is to involve parents in kindergarten activities. They blame lack of time, overwork, tiredness when being invited to such programs, although these are generally looked forward to by the children. They are proud of being able to introduce their parents to the others. Such joint project programs allow for learning the others' judgment of values. This is a long process, an important milestone of the kindergarten education program. This road can lead to understanding and tolerance and therefore different cultures can come closer to each other. Later the dialogue between cultures has to be started. When children are given the opportunity to find out about and find the value of things strange and unknown to them, they will look at „other” children not with hatred but envy. They can understand that in spite of having a different color of skin, speaking a

different language or liking a different kind of meal, the others are children all the same who look at the world happily and curiously. Everybody has to be given an equal opportunity to become part of the adult world. Every child needs to be helped to be able to overcome their disadvantage stemming from being different. If this happens in the kindergarten, the school will not find great differences. If help doesn't come in time, however, small stones will become mountains through the years that will shut children other than average out of society (Bencéné, 2009:67-75).

Integration or Segregation?

A big question of our society is whether handicapped, minority and non-native children should be educated in our institutions, integrated with the others. The other option is segregation, that was most common in the past. Fortunately the approach of our society has changed a lot, a handicapped child is not to be ashamed of, but living together is hardly without conflicts. Unfortunately the headcount in kindergarten groups is increasing, at most places it is near or more than 30. It has to be faced that there are less and less teachers and nurses in the kindergartens, it is not rare that there is only one helping person to 2-3 groups. In such cases the kindergarten teacher has more tasks to do, sometimes not even closely related to their scope of activities. Under such circumstances it means a greater responsibility for the teacher to undertake the job of educating a child other than the average. There is a need for trained helpers, pedagogical assistants, who could help the teachers when needed. Every day once or twice they could provide special development for the „other” children. Integration makes sense only if it works alongside the principle of normalization. Beside regular group activities they have to be provided with the appropriate special activities too or they may get lost among their fellows. For the system to work well there is a need for teachers and staff in the kindergartens, who are free from prejudices, tolerant and open. To form a multicultural atmosphere, open communication is essential between teachers, parents and children. It is important that the participants of the program should not be afraid to ask and should not withhold their fears, emotions and problems.

Children at kindergarten-age enjoy everything, want to know more and are open to things. They are happy to help, while they treat such activities as a game. The parents have to help in this process, since if they show another approach at home, multicultural education in the kindergarten will not be successful.

Multicultural education in the kindergarten requires pedagogy concentrating on the character which develops the ability of multicultural communication in the child. To achieve the most appropriate method is project pedagogy which leans on the joint work of the group. Being dependant on the other and achieving a common goal shapes responsibility for one another. With early multicultural education children will grow up in a different atmosphere, tolerance will be a natural characteristic of them.

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