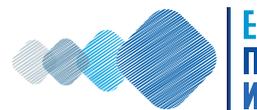


Working Papers



HOW TO ACHIEVE INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA?

2016 Skopje



HOW TO ACHIEVE A TRULY INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA?

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THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN (INTEGRATED) EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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HOW TO ACHIEVE A TRULY INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA?

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Abstract/Summary

Integration and inclusion in the education process have been a great challenge towards helping communities get to know each other more intensively. For the purpose of avoiding conflict situations among pupils from different ethnic backgrounds, the education system underwent segregation, manifestly or latently supported for many years in order to avoid conflict situations among pupils from different ethnic backgrounds,

Almost after a decade since the adoption of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the acknowledgment of failure of the education system in terms of developing social cohesion among culturally diversified groups, has started to emerge.

Yet, the contribution of international organizations in the field of integrated education is large, but nonetheless, central and local government institutions should create policies and programs to allow for positive integration of pupils from different ethnic communities.

The goal of this research is to analyse past achievements in the field of inter-ethnic integration of pupils in education by analysing past studies related to this field and by direct field research, including interviews with representatives of relevant central and local government institutions and non-governmental organizations.

Key words: Inter-ethnic integration, integrated education, social inclusion

Introduction

Cultural diversity in the Republic of Macedonia is incorporated in the fundamental provisions of statehood, and its protection and promotion is encouraged within the processes of integration into the European Union and NATO. Respecting the rights of different ethnic groups is guaranteed by the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Macedonia.

Seen through the prism of demography, diversity could be used as an advantage to the Republic of Macedonia. Still, social integration and inclusion have been a challenge for the Republic of Macedonia which, after a decade of its existence as an independent state, was pushed into an ethnic conflict between the two major ethnic communities – the Macedonian and the Albanian. It was finalized by signing the Ohrid Framework Agreement and changes in the constitutional order and legislation with reference to the rights of non-majority communities in the country.

Segregation in the educational system was supported, more or less openly, for many years, in order to avoid conflict situations among pupils of different ethnic groups. The outcome of this separation was: deepening of differences and closing of communities into their own areas. Almost a decade after the adoption of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, acknowledgment of the failure of the education system in terms of developing cohesion among culturally diversified groups has started emerging.

The previous conclusion about this situation has confirmed the fact that integrated education is a current topic for a public debate. In this respect, firstly the past implemented policies and projects on integrated education were identified. A review of the existing mechanisms for implementation of integrated education was made, as well, including analysis of stakeholders, such as: the national institutions, the local self-governments and the international organizations. Interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders with expertise in this area, in order to better identify differences and divisions, as well as the method of implementation of the integrated education concept. Possibilities were discussed for application of integrated education and the roles of local governments, the Ministry of Education and Science and other relevant institutions, including international ones.

The final section of the research provides certain recommendations for application of the integrated education component based on processed and analysed data.

Methodology and goals of the research

The goal of the research was to analyse the implementation of integrated education in the Republic of Macedonia, and to identify factors that influence the process or prevent its implementation. Further on, the research includes analysis of the current situation in the domain of integrated education, including factors that contribute to functionality, and the role of local governments in the process of decentralization.

In this respect, the research mostly refers to projects and public policies at national and local level that influence the implementation of the component of integrated education. Other questions included in the study are the following:

- What was the past practice in implementation of integrated education-related projects?
- Has the municipal decentralization process successfully influenced the functionality of integrated education?
- To what degree have international organizations contributed to integrated education?
- Which recommendations could be emphasized to improve integrated education functioning?

This research is based on analysis of documents, public policies and other studies, by means of desk research and field interviews.

Subject to analysis were legislative acts and secondary legislation, agreements, studies and reports from relevant national and international organisations, as well as works and studies of domestic and foreign experts.

Interviews were held with representatives of the local governments in Skopje, Tetovo, Kumanovo and Tearce, as well as with representatives of international organisations, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the Bureau for Development of Education.

Context

Integrated education, implying an educational system that allows for, fosters and supports inclusion and interaction of cultures among all actors, is a basic precondition for development of social cohesion and democratic principles in multicultural societies. Protection of human rights, including rights of minorities, is directly linked to maintaining peace and stability in countries. Therefore, states are obliged to provide participation and to guarantee equal opportunities for participation of members of all minorities in the economic, political, and social life in society. "Integration is fundamentally concerned with meeting the responsibilities that sovereignty entails, including respecting human rights and ensuring good and effective governance, and it is intimately related to the overall stability of any pluralist society" (Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies & Explanatory Note, 2012, pp. 3).

Cultural diversity in the Republic of Macedonia is incorporated in the fundamental provisions of statehood, and its protection and promotion is encouraged within the processes of integration into the European Union and NATO. Respecting the rights of different ethnic groups is guaranteed by the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Macedonia. In this context, members of the minority ethnic communities have a right and an opportunity to acquire their education in their mother tongue.¹

Western Balkan countries (including the Republic of Macedonia) have ratified major international conventions on human and minority rights, and they are undergoing a process of adoption in legislation. In 2008, education ministers from the South Eastern Europe countries signed a joint statement making a commitment to the area of human capital development in South Eastern Europe. This statement “expresses a commitment to promote: quality, diversity and equitable access to education; innovatory capacity within education systems; and intercultural capacities of educational institutions as key prerequisites to the prosperity and sustainable development of Western Balkan countries and their integration to the EU” (Spasovski, Ballazhi, & Friedman, 2010, pp. 10). However, appropriate legislation itself cannot overcome obstacles towards social inclusion and interaction, since it is necessary to pay attention to structural and institutional obstacles, as well. Normative framework analysis has demonstrated that the Constitution and the education-related laws contain provisions that promote respect for different cultures, tolerance and non-discrimination. Yet, the focus is on “forbidding discrimination as opposed to the promotion of these principles” (Petroska-Beska, Najcevska, Kenig, Ballazhi, & Tomovska, 2009, pp. 19).

Social Integration and Inclusion in the Republic of Macedonia

Social integration and inclusion have been a challenge for the Republic of Macedonia which, after a decade of its existence as an independent state, was pushed into an ethnic conflict between the two major ethnic communities – the Macedonian and the Albanian, ended by signing the Ohrid Framework Agreement and changes in the constitutional order and legislation with reference to the rights of non-majority communities in the country.

The Ohrid Framework Agreement contributed to improving of some rights of non-majority ethnic communities in the country. In the field of education, changes were made regarding high education; it was planned to establish state university education in the language of a community consisting of at least 20% of the total population. Regarding primary and secondary education, the Ohrid Framework Agreement reconfirmed the right to primary and secondary education in one's own mother tongue, as a legally regulated right guaranteed by the Constitution. Nevertheless, establishing parallel high education institutions on language/ethnic grounds only corroborated and intensified divisions among young generations whose national identity was stirred by the military conflict (Barbieri, Vrgova, & Bliznakovski, 2013).

Segregation in the education system has for long been, manifestly or latently, supported, in order to avoid conflict situations among pupils of different ethnic backgrounds. This separation resulted in strengthening the stereotypes and prejudice towards “the Other” in both major ethnic groups. Almost a decade after the adoption of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, there is an acknowledgment emerging of the failure of the education system to develop social cohesion among culturally diversified groups.

¹Amendment VIII of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia (Amendments IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, XVII and XVIII of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia No. 91 from 20/11/2001), 2016), Article 3 of the Law on Primary Education (Law on Primary Education (consolidated text), 2016), Article 4 of the Law on Secondary Education (Law on Secondary Education (consolidated text), 2016) and Article 103 of the Law on High Education (Law on High Education (consolidated text), 2016).

The implementation of the rights of the communities by the political factors in the country failed to create more intense integration. On the contrary, ethnic divisions, particularly among the youngsters, has intensified, and knowing “the Other” became anecdotic. Even though, at macro level, the inter-ethnic relations were improving due to the institutional approach linked to the Ohrid Agreement, insufficient interaction at individual level grew into a long-term threat to social cohesion (Georgieva, Velkovski, & Damovska, 2014, pp. 128). In this context, it is significant to mention the recommendations provided by the High Commissioners on Minorities, according to whom “segregation in education should be avoided, even when it is created by the minority communities themselves, at the same time fully respecting educational rights of persons belonging to minorities” (Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies & Explanatory Note, 2012, pp. 63).

Division is not formal: pupils from different ethnic backgrounds, both in primary and in secondary education, study according to essentially (not only in terms of language) different curricula regarding certain subjects (for e.g. History) that are of key importance for shaping their identity and defining their relation with other members of society, from the same or from a different cultural background. Regarding high education, parallel institutions and full segregation on ethnic grounds have been established.

In 2008, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities provided specific recommendations on interaction through education to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia. Recommendations pointed out that integrated education did not end by merely placing children of different ethnic groups into the same classroom. Integration implies “democratic and decentralized school management; interesting and inclusive textbooks; extra-curricular activities and de-politicization of the curricula and the textbooks” - aspects in which Macedonia has been lagging behind (Petroska-Beska, Najcevska, Kenig, Ballazhi, & Tomovska, 2009, pp. 21).

In this context, in 2010, the Ministry of Education and Science came up with a conclusion that, apart from the significant progress in the field of education in the past decade regarding education in the mother tongue, it was necessary to modify development guidelines in order to avoid intensification of ethnic divisions due to insufficient knowledge about “the Other” and reduced interaction due to lack of knowledge of the Other’s language. Because awareness about “the Other” develops at young age, schools have an exceptionally significant role in fostering positive feelings among different ethnic communities (Johann Schustereder & Simonovska-Janackovska, 2010).

In January 2010, the Ministry of Education and Science and OSCE, supported by the OSCE High Commissioner on Minorities, adopted a strategic document on “Steps towards Integrated Education in the Education System in the Republic of Macedonia” (2010), in order to introduce clear and extensive changes in the social approach to the education system with regards to the multi-ethnic reality in society. This document is a key starting point regarding measures linked to integrated education.

Measures provided in the Strategy implied reforms and activities in five areas of activities: interaction by means of extracurricular activities of pupils; intensifying mutual knowledge of languages of pupils and adults; adjustment of the curricula, programmes and textbooks (specifically emphasizing textbooks in history, geography, language learning, as well as introducing History of Religions as a subject); training for teachers to deal with inter-ethnic issues; and administration of schools in the context of decentralization (Steps towards Integrated Education in the Education System in the Republic of Macedonia, 2010). The Administration on Development and Improvement of Education in the Languages of the Members of the Communities and the Bureau on Development of Education should participate in all planned steps of the Strategy (Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education and Science 2015-2017, 2014)

Nevertheless, it is necessary to note that the Strategy primarily focuses on the role of primary and secondary education in the processes of increasing social cohesion among culturally diversified groups. However, the document fails to delegate any roles to high education as a factor of integrated education. Strong political pressure regarding implementation of certain reforms in primary education (related to learning Macedonian for pupils that attend classes in a different language) placed reform processes planned in the Strategy in the second place, and the Strategic Plan 2015-2017 of the Ministry of Education and Science (Ministry of Education and Science, 2014) has failed to introduce any new initiatives.

The 2012 research into the situation in the area of inter-ethnic interaction, implemented by the Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Resolving, in cooperation with the Macedonian Centre for Civil Education and the Bureau on Development of Education, suggests that about a quarter of primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Macedonia are bilingual or trilingual. Many primary schools, officially registered as bilingual or trilingual, fail to provide direct contact among pupils attending classes in different teaching languages. Only 13% of the schools provide for pupils of all teaching languages offered by the school to study under the same roof in all school years (Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Resolving, 2012, pp. 14). In the past decade, the number of multi-lingual schools in the Republic of Macedonia fell from 72 to 63 (Petroska-Beska, Najcevska, Kenig, Ballazhi, & Tomovska, 2009, pp. 7). Multicultural iconography is not a frequent thing in the schools, and if there is any, it is most often supported mainly by the language of the ethnic community it refers to, thereby failing to contribute to creating proper climate for building multiculturalism on school level. It has been concluded that, in schools with a significant number of Roma pupils, not many activities are carried out to facilitate their integration in the school and, oftentimes, iconography significant for the ethnic identity of the Roma is lacking. Interschool cooperation, which is more intensive at primary school level, mainly happens between schools with the same teaching language. In most multi-lingual schools there are no joint classes organized for any subject. In schools with joint classes, most often pupils are gathered together for the subject of physical education (Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, 2010).

Moreover, most teachers are not properly trained to work with children and parents from different social and cultural backgrounds. Numerous studies have confirmed the need for enhancing competencies of teachers in recognising, accepting and valuing diversity in the classroom and wider in society, as well as the need to work on developing skills of teachers to overcome discrimination, exclusion and injustice in education.

The analysis of curricula and programmes of the reformed nine-years' primary education has demonstrated that they are a suitable basis for implementation and promotion of multiculturalism in schools (Petroska-Beska, Najcevska, Kenig, Ballazhi, & Tomovska, 2009). Progress included introduction of Macedonian language for other communities in the first grade²; however, introduction of local languages for pupils of Macedonian ethnicity is limited.³ Also, introducing Macedonian language as a regular subject in the first grade for pupils that attend classes in a different language came under strong political pressure from the Albanian political block and failed to be implemented, bringing into question the implementation of the remaining reform measures from the integrated education strategy. Teaching programmes, in particular regarding the subject of Life Skills and optional subjects as well, include educational goals that promote multiculturalism and respect for the cultural/ethnic differences.

²Macedonian language was planned to be introduced in 2009/2010 school year, as an obligatory subject for first grade primary education (as well as English) for pupils that attend classes in a different language. Since the independence, this subject has been taught from the fourth grade.

³Pupils who attend classes in Macedonian, have an opportunity to choose to learn Albanian as an optional subject; optional subjects include The Language and Culture of Vlachs, The Language and Culture of the Roma, and The Language and Culture of Bosniaks.

Most problems have been identified with reference to History as a subject, since learning about the history of other ethnic groups depends exclusively on the wishes of teachers.

Textbooks support ethnocentrism. In general, there is a lack of contents, characters, pictures and authors that would help pupils get acquainted with culture and tradition of other ethnic communities, as well as to develop an understanding for shared values (Petroska-Beska, Najcevska, Kenig, Ballazhi, & Tomovska, 2009). Schools are lacking capacities for constructive conflict resolution. Formal organizations of pupils/students exist, but their role is marginal, and they do not participate in the decision-making process or in the inter-ethnic dialogue.

The analysis of several teachers' handbooks in subjects including: Exploring the Birth Place, Our Fatherland, Dances and Folk Dances (Janevski, Ilik, & Vitanova, 2008; Apostolovska-Tosevska & Jurukov, 2008; Brasnarska & Gievski, 2008) fail to present guidelines for promoting multiculturalism and for accepting, respecting and valuing cultural differences and their contribution to the national identity.

In general, textbooks demonstrate an ethnocentric position, rather than providing grounds for shared civil and national identity. In most cases, textbooks contribute to developing separate ethnic identities (Petroska-Beska, Najcevska, Kenig, Ballazhi, & Tomovska, 2009).

Problems in the area of educational integration, according to analyses by Georgieva, Velkovska and Damovska, primarily refer to the following:

1. Establishing parallel education systems that contributed to spatial distance;
2. 'Factographic' presentation of traditional elements of other cultures in textbooks and in the process of teaching; accent is placed on cognitive acquisition, lacking processes of understanding, valuing and respecting;
3. Lack of school and extracurricular activities for the youth of different cultures to participate in. Minimal efforts have been undertaken so far by state institutions to improve this situation.
4. Teaching staff lacks skills in intercultural education. This situation is worsened by the rigidity of normative acts and standards regulating education and curricula, which are rarely directed towards acquiring, promoting and developing intercultural skills;
5. Strong influence of non-formal and informal channels of education (family, local community, religious community, media, political parties);
6. Lack of clearly defined national and local goals in education. In addition, (mis)use of education for strengthening ethnocentrism may bring about numerous negative implications in the future;
7. Political structures fail to practically confirm declared goals inherent to the educational regulation and education in general (Georgieva, Velkovski, & Damovska, 2014, pp. 128-129).

Speaking about measures and activities referring to promotion of integrated education in the Republic of Macedonia, regardless of the Strategy adopted by the line ministry, it is necessary to note that most initiatives relating to this problem come from joint activities of international organizations and civil organisations, whereas the commitment of system institutions is negligible. The 2015 EC Progress Report for the Republic of Macedonia recommends that evaluation is carried out of the reforms implemented in the past decade, stressing the need to establish a new strategic plan "linking all reform processes and involving a wide range of stakeholders" (European Commission, 2015, pp. 66). The Ministry of Education and Science, in the Strategic Work Plan, has failed to include programmes directly referring to the processes of educational integration. Programmes that could have indirect impact are those about educational inclusion of marginalized groups (primarily within the Roma Decade Programme) and persons with special needs; also developing and supporting decentralization processes in education could also be helpful (Ministry of Education and Science, 2014, pp. 66).

Regarding initiatives by international institutions and civil organizations, as some kind of substitute for the moratorium of reforms in the integrated education strategy, numerous studies, projects and other activities have been conducted in the past several years. USAID in cooperation with key educational institutions, municipalities, and civil sector partners, carried out the Inter-ethnic Integration in Education Project in the period between 2011 and 2015. This project produced several case studies about secondary schools in Skopje and other towns in Macedonia. Field research outcomes could be useful grounds for development of handbooks related to different aspects of integrated education (joint activities in mixed ethnic/language groups, democratic participation of pupils, etc.), including guides and trainings on multi-ethnic integration in schools.

In the period 2012-2013, the Ministry of Education and Science, supported by the Norwegian Embassy, implemented the "We Learn Together" Project, focusing on integration of pupils from different cultural backgrounds by means of extracurricular activities; 70 schools in 25 municipalities were covered with the project (Presentation of some activities of the integrated education project "We Learn Together", 2012).

In December 2013, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and the Union of Local Self-Government Units in the Republic of Macedonia (ZELS) organized a working session for local government employees responsible for education on "Concepts and Practices in Integrated Education in the Republic of Macedonia" (Concepts and Practices in Integrated Education, 2013).

In 2013, a second integrated education dedicated international conference on "Integrated Education – Trend, Tendency and Need" was organized by the Nansen Dialogue Centre. About 90 teachers underwent training on implementation of principles of integrated education in the teaching process. One of the conclusions at the conference referred to the growing ethnic segregation in the education system in the Republic of Macedonia as a factor contributing to ethnic intolerance and distance among the youngsters (Conference on integrated education on overcoming ethnic divisions in schools, 2013). At the beginning of January 2015, the Foundation on Integrated Education was launched (The Administrative Board of the Foundation on integrated education held its kick-off meeting, 2015). All past initiatives targeted pre-school, primary and secondary education as key areas for initiation of processes of getting ethnic communities closer to each other. The lack of any initiatives on educational integration should be noted in high education. This fact is worrisome if one takes into account that ethnic segregation in high education could diminish the positive effects achieved in primary and secondary education. The problem in the role of high education in Macedonian multi-ethnic society emerged from the wider context of inter-ethnic relations, particularly as a problem of access to high education by non-majority groups. It grew into the most visible aspect of inter-ethnic tensions, as access to high education was politicized (Georgieva, Velkovski, & Damovska, 2014).

The Ministry of Education and Science has listed several measures in the new Strategic Plan, which could indirectly contribute to improving the situation in the field of educational integration. Namely, it has been planned for languages of the communities to be introduced as optional subjects at teaching colleges at the Faculty of Philology in Skopje, as well as quotas for enrolment of representatives of the less numerous communities (Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education and Science 2015-2017, 2014, pp. 64-65). Even though these measures could indirectly contribute to integration of members of smaller ethnic communities, it is not expected that more significant results are to be achieved regarding bringing closer Macedonians and Albanians who are fully segregated in terms of language/ethnicity at university level. There is some interaction at third-cycle level studies, albeit pragmatic and formal, failing to be an expression of essentially bringing closer the two communities.

When designing strategies for integration in high education, it is significant for institutions in the area of high education, by stressing positive practice (mixed campuses, availability of several language courses, additional activities etc.) to understand limitations of the integrated education concept and to encourage "redefining the concept of high education, which is wider, inclusive and humanistic, and it includes needs of the wider society, rather than concentrate on satisfying the needs of the separate ethnic groups" (Georgieva, Velkovski, & Damovska, 2014, pp. 134).

Decentralization and education

The role of local self-government in integrated education in the Republic of Macedonia

The process of decentralization gave the municipalities a series of powers and responsibilities, bringing government closer to citizens.

Having in mind that education is an important part in the development of a society, one may make a logical conclusion that the decentralization process places municipalities in a position as key actors in implementation of the integrated education process.

Speaking about the significance of local self-governments in the process of integrated education, an additional argument is the fact that municipalities are responsible for founding, funding and managing primary and secondary schools (Local Self-Government Act, 2002). Furthermore, apart from the local administration, significant entities at local level are also principals, school boards, teachers' councils, parents' councils and the key affected party – the pupils. Therefore decentralization implies encouraging citizens to be more actively involved in the process of decision-making in several areas, including education. All these components are exceptionally significant for implementation of the integrated education concept, particularly in municipalities of heterogenic ethnic structure.

On the other hand, although integrated education is a global trend, in Macedonia this concept is perceived as utopian. Analyses so far have demonstrated that all previous attempts made in this direction were initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science, without prior analysis and consultations with the implementers – the municipalities, which have in-depth knowledge about the situation on field. Actually avoiding the 'bottom-up' approach may place this component at risk of becoming a political issue. Hence, the attempt of the Ministry of Education and Science to implement the provision on obligatory learning Macedonian from the first grade for pupils attending classes in a different language, came under pressure from the Albanian political block, and consequently threatened the implementation of the remaining reform measures from the integrated education strategy.

A conclusion coming from this analysis is that segregation in the education system was supported for many years, in order to avoid conflict situations among pupils from different ethnic groups, and points out to the growing crisis linked to efforts for integration, including the key question – how can integration be achieved in conditions that lack communication?

Namely, experience so far has demonstrated that implementation of activities regarding integrated education happens at project level; such activities end as the projects are finalized. This has been confirmed also in the interviews with municipal representatives covered by this project.

In addition, finance has been a key factor for implementation of activities on integrated education. Municipalities are lacking a specific financial item on integrated education. Speaking about decentralization, this process is accompanied by establishing mechanisms on financing the municipalities, which implies allocation of earmarked funds and blocked grants to be used by municipalities for activities in their power. However, the design of the block grants formula and the interviews conducted for the purposes of this project confirmed the lack of a separate 'coefficient' for integrated education; therefore municipalities are not in a position to contribute financially to this area.

Analysis of data obtained from the interviews conducted

Data analysis from the interviews conducted with local government representatives disclosed the fact that implementation of integrated education-related activities are at project level, whereas municipalities only appear as implementers when they are tasked to do so by the Ministry of Education and Science. Still, interviewees expressed several views that could contribute to functional integrated education, and they are related to the lack of finances for implementation of functional education. Speaking about allocation of funds by the central government to the municipalities, this is done by means of 'block grants' without a separate budget item in the education budget; these funds would be exclusively earmarked for developing or implementing the integrated education component. Most often, the practice when implementing this type of projects or activities was that either municipalities provided budget funds earmarked for activities of the civil sector, or funds were provided in cooperation with international donors. Interviewees, therefore, pointed out the need to introduce a special coefficient for integrated education, thereby increasing responsibilities of local governments for implementing and undertaking specific activities in the field of integrated education.

Opinions of respondents regarding initiatives on joint projects related to multi-ethnic integrated education, point out that such projects have always been initiated and supported by international donors, but, on the other hand, absence of certain schools in these projects is a worrisome fact (representative of the Municipality of Kumanovo). A similar example was pointed out by representatives of the Municipality of Tearce, regarding the issue of promoting multi-ethnic integration in education.

Despite the fact that Tearce, as a municipality, has planned for a project of organizing social events within their Multi-ethnic Education Programme, so far, only a single event was initiated to support socialization among pupils, and the feedback did not come from pupils of all ethnic communities. The other efforts and activities have been implemented by support of international donors (USAID, OSCE).

Local government representatives positively assess the cooperation with donors regarding project implementation, but point out the need for all parties to get involved in mutual understanding, and particularly the media and the political parties, which have huge impact on the multi-ethnic relations at local level.

Furthermore, local government representatives pointed out that financial problems faced by the municipalities are the most serious obstacle for this policy to be permanent. According to the majority of respondents, past activities related to this issue, irrespective of whether they had been implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science or with a domestic or international organization, had ended as the projects closed down.

Another weakness pointed out during the interviews was the lack of separate department for integrated education at the Ministry of Education and Science which has the role of the main education policy-maker. On the other hand, municipalities, and particularly those with heterogenic ethnic structure, have either little capacities for management of activities related to integrated education, or are preoccupied with different activities they are tasked with by the education departments within local governments.

In addition, local government representatives also pointed out the operative and systemic support upon implementation of integrated education and stated that, despite the commitment given, the Ministry of Education and Science should provide clear guidelines for implementation, stressing that initiatives should rather start from schools and municipalities, than from civil organizations projects, which have, anyhow, positively contributed as such.

Interviews with representatives from the NGO sector and from international organizations

Analysis of data obtained from interviews with representatives of NGOs and international organizations regarding integrated education points out to different perspectives about the implementation and the efficiency of integrated education. They consider that project implementation requires an extended approach and cooperation with the pupils, as well as the wider public, stressing that, apart from the institutions, relevant stakeholders are also: parents, teachers, political parties, media and other key actors, for the purpose of getting the will and the common interest. With regards to finance, international organization representatives also stressed the problem of lack of finance by the municipalities for implementation of integrated education. Respondents pointed out positive examples of activities, where municipalities imposed themselves as partners (cooperation of the Nansen Dialogue Centre from Norway and the municipalities in Strumica, Petrov, Konce, Karbinci, Tetovo and Cair).

In general, there is agreement among NGO representatives and the local and central governments, that political parties are a relevant factor that could greatly contribute to integrated education. According to the Norwegian Nansen Dialogue Centre representative, this organization has been continuously working in Macedonia on the implementation of integrated education concept. He pointed out several examples of good practice and working with parents and local leaders, stating the example of the Municipality of Jegunovce.

The Nansen Dialogue Centre has been developing an Integrated Education Model within its programme, whose vision is "an education model that fosters, encourages and integrates multi-ethnic values and bilingualism, and promotes and supports partnership relations among pupils, teachers and parents, stimulates inclusion of communities by establishing harmonious relations, based on respecting the differences". The representative of the Nansen Dialogue Centre also mentioned the programmes for pupils, parents and teachers operating within this model. He also stressed that this programme is used to invest in schools to improve working conditions, helping them transform themselves into multifunctional schools for the purpose of having high quality regular classes and extracurricular activities, initiating better communication between school staff and parents.

In addition, the programmes of Nansen Dialogue Centre incorporate a Training Centre offering practical training on the Nansen Integrated Education Model, dedicated to providing professional development for teachers, professors, educators, psychologists, education inspectors and school principals.

The Macedonian Centre on Civil Education (MCCE) is an organization whose mission is also to develop education programmes and to offer services to educational and other public institutions. So far, they have implemented numerous projects directly related to integrated education. The MCCE representative pointed out their two directional work both with schools and institutions; he considers this approach essential since it requires agreement by many different parties. There is positive assessment for the cooperation with national institutions responsible for implementation of integrated education, including past activities within projects implemented in cooperation with the municipalities. According to his opinion, there are challenges on daily basis and, being asked where he saw integrated education in several years, the MCCE representative indicated that integrated education was a process supported by the state, the municipalities, the media and the whole society, stressing that the process required support from all sides.

The great achievement of MCCE is the fact that the project on inter-ethnic integration in education was imposed as institutional policy, implying that it will be supported in the future, as well.

Interviews with representatives of parents' councils and pupils

Opinions of representatives of parents' councils and pupils with regards to integrated education have demonstrated readiness on their behalf for cooperation and development of any integrated education activities.

With regards to parents representing the Parents' Council of the 'Cvetan Dimov' Secondary School of the City of Skopje, they agree to any kind of cooperation among children of different communities. According to them, the largest problems are the politics and the political discourse of politicians. Children, including the inter-ethnic communities, are victims to politicians' vote-harvesting. There are always incidents among pupils at times when election campaigns are on-going. A similar position was stated by a member of the Parents' Council in a primary school in the Municipality of Saraj. According to these parents, politics should stand aside in order to have success in improving inter-ethnic relations by means of integrated education, since politicians oftentimes 'heat up' their rhetoric and this has an impact over the youth. If we want success, politics should stand aside.

On the other hand, a representative of the Secondary School Students Union also stressed the will affected parties (pupils) have for implementation of integrated education. So far, they have participated in inter-ethnic cohabitation-related projects supported by both national institutions and by domestic and international organizations; they find no problems in this policy being permanent and supported as official policy of the Ministry of Education and Science.

With reference to the implementation of policies on improving inter-ethnic cohabitation in the domain of education by means of integrated education, pupils are ready to be involved as actors; however, the Education Ministry has the main word in initiating such policies. Hence, pupils act according to

Conclusions and recommendations

The fact that the Macedonian education system is largely segregated from an ethnic aspect, particularly in primary and secondary education, this study attempted to identify some policies at central level and opportunities enabled by decentralization referring to implementation of integrated education policies. In this respect, the research was focused on analysis of existing policies and efforts made by national institutions, as well as opportunities enabled by decentralization regarding new powers in the field of education. In this context, interviews were conducted with members of the central government, the local governments, non-governmental organizations and international organizations, parents' councils, and teachers and pupils. The analysis and the information obtained in the interviews point out to the following conclusions:

Some of the people who were interviewed for the needs of this analysis stressed that so far, integrated education was being implemented by internationally supported projects; so did the local government representatives suggesting that all came down at project level and ended when projects finished; otherwise, there were no obstacles imposed either by pupils or parents regarding the implementation of integrated education policy.

Further on, this research suggests that the Macedonian education system is characterized by serious weaknesses regarding plans for implementation of the integrated education component. Often, politics has a huge impact on the implementation of education-related policies, and it generally withholds the opportunity for cohesion among pupils of different ethnic communities.

In this context, political actors at central and local level could be promoters of integrated education, but instead, they are seen as the main actors impairing integrative policies.

Therefore, it is necessary to take specific measures for integrated education policy implementation helping pupils from different ethnic communities integrate and promote cohabitation, mutual values, dialogue and tolerance. So, this document also provides certain recommendations for improving education policies referring to integrated education.

The state should support local government institutions, since they hold opportunities to promote schools teaching in different languages.

The Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for Development of Education should introduce programmes and classes for learning about the culture of ethnic communities and multi-cultural development, particularly in primary education.

Education institutions should be strengthened, allowing pupils to have contact to overcome the current segregation of pupils, particularly in secondary education.

Measures should be undertaken to overcome the current segregation in education.

Integrated education institutions should be promoted to allow pupils from different ethnic communities to attend classes in the same school building.

The Ministry of Education and Science should promote classes or education activities to be attended by pupils from different ethnic communities.

Curricula should be developed to promote differences, multiculturalism and tolerance. There should be obligatory classes for learning the language of the other community. Precisely define mechanisms for promotion of the principles of respect and tolerance, and ensure they are reflected in the legislation related to education at all levels;

Introduce obligatory contents referring to enhancing the knowledge about "the Others", and promotion of intercultural aspects in the curricula (for e.g. in subjects such as History, mother tongue, Our Fatherland, Folk Dances, Exploring the Birth Place for primary education);

Establish training mechanisms for the teaching staff within the framework of formal education, as well as evaluation mechanisms for the application of the acquired knowledge in the educational process; Establish mechanisms for promotion of learning the language of "the Other" (competitions and scholarships) in primary and secondary education;

Continue the promotion of cooperation between teaching staff and schools that offer classes in different languages (extracurricular activities, joint excursions and celebration events);

Avoid physical barriers in multilingual schools among pupils of different cultural background (going to school in different buildings, different shifts, etc.);

Establish classes where teaching would be in two or three languages;

Integrated education policies should be managed by municipalities due to their extensive experience on the situation and the challenges at local level;

The Ministry of Education and Science should establish separate items for integrated education when allocating funds through block grants;

The Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau on Development of Education should undertake measures to remove texts and textbooks creating stereotypes and prejudice;

Municipalities with heterogeneous ethnic communities should receive more funding in order to promote integrated schools and to implement the integrated education component;

Establish mechanisms in high education to promote cooperation between universities that teach in different languages (joint research projects, conferences, etc.).

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Interview List

1. Interview with Daniela Zaharieva – responsible for the education sector in the City of Skopje
2. Interview with Zika Atanasovski – responsible for the education sector in the Municipality of Kumanovo
3. Interview with Isen Asani – Mayor of the Municipality of Tearce
4. Interview with Besim Aliu – Principal of Primary School 'Kiril Pejcinovik', Tearce
5. Interview with Muhamed I. – Head of the Department of Education in the Municipality of Tearce
6. Interview with Teuta Dauti – English language teacher, participant in MIO projects
7. Interview with George Nikolov – Ministry of Education and Science, Deputy Chairperson of the MES working group on interethnic education
8. Zaneta Chonteva – Bureau on Educational Development, member of the MES working group on inter-ethnic education
9. Interview with Ahmed Qazimi – Head of General Affairs Department in the Municipality of Tetovo
10. Interview with Nebojsa Mojsoski – Inter-ethnic Education Project coordinator at MCCE
11. Interview with Jasir Asani – pupil, President of the Students Union at the 'Cvetan Dimov' Secondary School of the City of Skopje – Skopje
12. Interview with Veton Zekolli, Project Manager at the Nansen Dialogue Centre

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN (INTEGRATED) EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Summary/abstract

The existing educational system in the Republic of Macedonia is entirely segregated and leads to a further and increased social segregation. This danger is a stated fact. In order to overcome it, a Strategy for Integrated Education on national level has been elaborated and implemented for several years now. The education system setup is highly centralized, thereby suppressing the possible grass-roots self-initiatives. Additionally, the teachers - being the most responsible ones to implement the programs derived from the Strategy - experience them as another imposing obligation for which they are not rewarded and feel threatened if they do not fulfil them. The lack of motivation, which has been identified during this research, is present with the parents which are not properly included, i.e. the whole responsibility lies "on the shoulders" of the institutional representatives. Further, the existing intuitional approach creates reification and strengthens the ethnic separations by directly addressing some kind of integration, assuming and emphasizing the existing difference. Thus, it becomes very difficult to overcome the separation.

By identifying these structural and system weaknesses, the offered approach encourages the grass-roots self-initiatives, by making the path for the inclusion through involvement and engagement of self-encouraged contributors instead of relying on imposed initiatives. Extracurricular programs encouraging the universal human dimensions overcome and disregard the ethnic politicized problems. The programs that are recognized and developed by direct stakeholders promise persistence, originality and complete merging into the specific local environments. The sustainability of these extracurricular activities is far more promising than integrative programs imposed with the top-down approach. The approach itself favors inclusive education that will create open and conscious citizens, rather than integrated political subjects who are forced to accept ethnic categorization. The ecological, human and social solidarity component is an incentive for active and watchful citizenship that doesn't delegate its problems passively to some alienated centers of power, but solves and overcomes them with own initiative.

Introduction

The education in the Republic of Macedonia, whilst, on one hand, satisfying the needs for preserving the language and the identity needs of major ethnic communities in the country, creates a gap among them, on the other. It is either the schools that are completely detached or the pupils which are separated in different shifts and, certainly, attend even separate classes. Thus settled education system is a source for wider social segregation (Barbiery, Vrgova, Bliznakovski, 2013:3). There is nothing new in this statement. It has been known for a long time and certain measures have been practiced to overcome the separation. Opposite to separation is integration; hence, we shouldn't be surprised by different measures, policies and strategies for integrated education. Some recent and actual programs that are applied will be mentioned below. We would suggest that a more adequate term is "inclusive" education, because inclusivity assumes equality and equal opportunities, not a separation that will be subsequently integrated. However, it is a well known fact that these measures do not give the desirable results, at least not in some generally acceptable terms. Therefore, we offer a modified approach of some measures, but most of all, an approach that requires minimum centralization and top-down management and, most important, if it starts being operational, it promises self-sustainability in the long run. The effects would be, certainly, more comprehensible than an integrated education and would contribute to a more integrated society.

The key segment of our approach is that it does not mention, neither glorify nor mystify the integrated education. The integration cannot be achieved only by talking about it, but through integrating practice. The more this practice avoids the integration of some imagined, reified ethnic communities as a goal, the more it will get closer to the goal. Instead of intentionally conceived integrating contents, it offers recollection on universal issues, general problems and common human interests. Overcoming fixed identities is possible if the complexity and stratification of the existing differences is accepted not only in reified groups and categories, but when those differences are accepted as embedded in every individual (Bodenhausen, 2010). By highlighting the importance of a series of unsolved and painstaking questions of our social and natural environment and indicating the possibility of taking direct, personal, but united steps for improvement thereof, we can enable pupils, parents and teachers be reminded of the universal, human values. Giving them the opportunity to be self-organized and to accomplish changes, we can help them relieve themselves from party identity restraints. Macedonia is a country in which ethnic nationalism is a dominant political driving force and the manipulation with fixed politicized identities is necessary for the existence of this system. Encouraging the consciousness and activism among young people, in cooperation with their parents and teachers, can dethrone ethnic issues and their politicization, contribute to overcoming the artificial segregations and acknowledge the indispensable need for a joint action.

The foundation of the offered approach is the "theory of contact" or "contact hypothesis" which is under development for almost half a century, primarily in the scientific area of social psychology (Pettigrew, Tropp, 2006; Hewstone, 2009). Upgrading the primary insight of George Alport ("The nature of prejudices", 1954) who postulates the problem of stereotyping and prejudices of human interaction since late 1950, this discipline elaborates, reassesses and investigates the assumption that the contact between members of different categories of people leads to their bigger mutual understanding and accepting of differences.

Recent surveys refining the theory of contact, show that there is influence in overcoming the prejudices through balance of power, i.e. social status (Henry, Hardin, 2006). More precise, members of the group with higher status find it more difficult to change their attitudes. This component is especially important if it strives to overcome negative stereotypes and prejudices, implanted in the population in Macedonia.

It is possible that, neglecting this aspect is the greatest obstacle for effective implementation of existing programs for integrated education. In our approach, we do not offer a profound understanding of differences and their putting into perspective of increased tolerance. On the contrary, we offer situations of contact which disregard, neglect and leave out the differences produced from the political discourse in the country, and encourage the consideration of general human needs and understanding of their stance to each other; common human solidarity and community, not a division and separation through managing the differences, but through their overcoming. Emphasizing the universal human values and encouraging sensitivity for issues like: endangered human environment, overcoming and facilitating social separation, developing empathy for vulnerable categories like the elderly, lonely and disempowered people and persons with special needs, aims to contribute to overcoming the differences in status and ethnicity, which is very important, especially when dealing with situation of overlapping the ethnic affiliation with the status in the society.

The opportunity for this research subject on enforcement of public policy for integrated education in the units of local self-government, includes the limited role of the municipalities in creating and adoption of educational facilities and, consequently, offers extracurricular activities. The accent of these extracurricular activities is on universal human values, which are, unfortunately, neglected in the educational process and in the public sphere in the Republic of Macedonia in general. Bearing in mind the limited role of the curricular contents, developed on central level, we put focus on extracurricular contents which leaves space for self-organizing. The approach of achieving integrating effect is indicating the problems and issues which concern all of us, regardless of our identity determinations.

The possible issues and areas that would be elaborated in the extracurricular activities are completely ignoring ethnical and religious differences, being the most common and strongest political driving forces in Macedonia. We start from the awareness that the political manipulation with these categories of social differentiation will completely forbade or, to a great extent, distort the perception of an integrated policy which would be based on such kind of direct approach. Thence, our approach is absolutely above-ethnical and above-national. The mutual denominator for all these sub-subjects and activities arising from them is the real need for acting for the common good. The proposed policies are developing the consciousness of mutual addressing in cooperation and solidarity for achieving mutual interests.

The apolitical and ethnic and religious agnosticism in our approach is completely intentional and chosen as essentially appropriate, primarily due to the sensitivity of any intervention in the educational area and the age of direct stakeholders. The aim is to bring understanding and awareness about general problems and their solving through association and community. The elemental human values and essential human problems of modern existence will be approximated to the pupils through direct identification of the problems and preparation of activities shaped by them, thus securing their interest for implementation and will give them the possibility to give full personal input in the creation of actions. "Learning through practice" is, probably, the most efficient pedagogical method and its application is a guarantee for long-lasting remembrance of the lessons learnt. What we hope to achieve is that the pupils understand the width of common human problems of ecological and social nature and the possibility for their overcoming through mutual, voluntary and self-organized actions. This will help them perceive the power of solidarity and teamed social existence, mutual interdependence and necessity of functioning in a community of equal, but not egoistic, or collectively subordinated individuals. The building of community on these fundamentals overcomes the ethnic, religious and class stratification and enables awareness of basic human values and needs, relieved from all ideological, political, party and other segregations.

Review of existing researches and practices

This section will present the educational system and its legislative regulation, its embodiment into the social system and adequate levels of responsibility and jurisdiction. This is necessary for considering the implementation of new inclusive practices through extracurricular activities. Further follows an analysis of existing official programs for integrated education and evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses. Based on this analysis we postulate our proposition for public policy.

Legal framework for functioning of primary education in the Republic of Macedonia

Primary schools are divided according to the founder and can be public and municipal. Public schools are founded by the Government while municipal ones are founded by the municipality, based on an opinion received from the Government (article 16, Law on Primary Education). The financing of primary schools falls under jurisdiction of municipalities (Law on Local Self-government, Article 22). By the Article 25 from the same Law, the Minister of Education and Science determines the concept of education and curriculum programs, upon which curriculum programs and curriculum plans are adopted, whereas in the primary school the education program is organized and implemented according to the curriculum plan determined by the Minister upon proposal of the Bureau for Development of Education.

The primary school management body is the School Board composed of nine members: three representatives of the teachers, expert associates and educators in the school, three representatives of the parents, two representatives of the founder and one representative from the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). The mandate of the members is three years, while the mandate of the parents is until finishing the education of their child, but not longer than three years. The decisions are adopted by majority of the votes. The teachers' representatives are chosen by the Teachers' Council, while parents' representatives are chosen by the Parents' Council. This body regulates: the Statute, the Annual program and the Report of the school presented to the Municipal Council, adopts: the program for school development, the program for implementing higher standards and other programs, proposes: financial program to the founder and financial reports, announces public calls for electing a new principal and other obligations regulated by the Law.

From other aspect, managing body of the school is also the Teachers' Council composed by primary school teachers and associates and is convened by the school principal. This body is responsible for the Annual Development Program and Working Program. It analyses the curriculum plan and programs and their implementation, plans for self-evaluation and integral evaluation, pupils' success and approves their advance in the school, analyses the Annual Report of teachers' work and associates and National report teachers' work and associates, suggests promotion of the teachers and associates, adopts decisions for educational measures for the pupils etc.

The quality of classes in the primary school, according to the legislative framework, is provided through the School Board which adopts a Development Program every four years. The Development Program takes into consideration the results of self-evaluation conducted by the school commission, advisory and professional support by the Bureau for Education Development, recommendations from the report of the integral evaluation, which is conducted by the State Inspectorate for Education, as well as the results of the external evaluation contained in the Annual Report of teachers' and associates' operation from the State Examination Center. The self-evaluation is carried out every two years and is conducted by a Commission compiled by teachers, associates and parents' representatives, established by the School Board upon a proposal of the principal.

This process of self-evaluation covers the areas of organization and realization of the classes and curriculum, pupils' successes, professional development of teachers, associates and educators, public communications, cooperation with the parents and local environment. The report of this self-evaluation with suggested improvement measures is submitted to the School Board, the principal and the school founder. The principal and the School Board are responsible for acting upon suggested improvement measures.

The financing of primary schools is secured through block subsidies and targeted subsidies from the state budget in compliance with the Law on Primary Education, Law on Budget of the Republic of Macedonia, Law on Execution of the Budget of the Republic of Macedonia and Law on financing the Units of the Local Self-government. The calculation of the amount of the financial assets received by the municipality for schools management depends on the number and density of the population and the number of pupils in that municipality. The Ministry of Education and Science sets standards and criteria, under which funds for the state primary schools will be allocated, while the Municipality council determines the terms and criteria for municipality primary schools.

The control mechanism for the proper operation of schools is partially in the hands of the State Inspectorate for Education. Under its competence are: checking the conditions for performing curriculum activity, conditions in schools and student dormitories, educational process from preschoolers until high school, special conditions for election and upgrade of teachers, associates and educators, use of textbooks, realization of curriculum plans and program and extracurricular activities. However, the general and detailed control is conducted by the Bureau for Educational Development (BED), starting from preschool education to high school, vocational high school and art school, special education and education for adults, education for children with special needs and education for children of Macedonian citizens abroad who learn Macedonian language and culture. The Bureau for Educational Development suggests to the Minister the concepts of education and curriculum programs from preschool age to high school. Besides this, BED drafts educational standards, as well as standards for rating pupils' achievements, creates concept for textbook, program for publishing and expert valuation of a textbook. BED also suggests tests to the State Examination Center for external testing of the pupils from primary, high school and vocational education, as well as general schedule for verification of the pupils' achievements on subjects in primary, high school and vocational education. The full control of the quality of textbooks, curriculum program and external testing of the pupils, together with the control of the progress of curriculum staff, lies within the competence of BED.

Field trips/excursions and other free activities of the pupils are regulated by the Rulebook on the method of conducting field trips/excursions and other free activities of pupils in primary school, i.e. a by-law set in the Law on primary education. This Law stipulates that, for every field trip program and other free activities conducted by a professional team, separate opinion should be obtained from the Parents' council to the Bureau for Educational Development and the Municipal Council, at least 30 days before its commencement. Based on this opinion, the School Board approves every field trip/excursion program and other free activities at least 20 days before commencement thereof. A question is raised here about the enforceability of the suggested extracurricular activity. This is the positioning of the educational system and it is obvious that it would be naïve to expect that teachers, pupils and parents will be encouraged by a pure enthusiasm to endure all these administrative procedures. Motivational presentations for the usefulness and correctness of this approach will require special attention.

Subject of analysis were: the Law on Local Self-government, the Law on Primary Education, the Law on the Local Self-governments Units, the Law on Bureau for Educational Development, the Law on Primary and High Schools, the Law on Educational Inspection, the by-laws on textbooks, Rulebook on the method of conducting field trips/excursions and other free activities of pupils in primary school (Law on Primary Education).

Practices in implementation of measures that enable integrated education

The multi-ethnicity in the Republic of Macedonia is a reality. The Ohrid Framework Agreement, from its adoption to date, is focused on transferring that reality into political engagement on micro level by measures for integration of minority communities through employment in the public and local administration. However, at wider social level, the cohesion on personal level is lacking or is totally absent, which represents a threat for deepening the gap between the differences on ethnic base or, in other words, the question raised here is whether it is enough, in the long run, for the policy of integration through employment in the public administration to create a deeper cohesion in the society and eliminate the threat of deepening the gap based on ethnicity. Since 2008, there is an effort to overcome this gap through the educational system in cooperation with international organizations. A Strategy has been adopted in 2010, in which a couple of key principles have been presented as guidelines for building cohesion:

- a) Promotion of the integration through multi-ethnic curriculum plans and programs and extracurricular activities in primary and high schools;
- b) Adaptation of curriculum programs and textbooks through introduction of issues on mutual tolerance and intercultural communication with the aim of eliminating the negative stereotypes and intolerance, whilst introducing and encouraging the critical manner of presentation of the subjects. In this part, the commitment is that the Ministry of Education and Science takes over the responsibility, besides the licensing of publishing textbooks, to check the contents of printed textbooks, which necessitates the establishment of control mechanisms;
- c) Stimulating the knowledge, consciousness and approach of teachers, current and future, in order to eliminate antagonisms and stereotypes based on ethnicity through curriculum and upbringing;
- d) Coordinated activity from central to local level with municipal competences set with the decentralization process in the part of primary schools, the most important being: the introduction of authorized inspectors for education at municipal level and providing continuity of teachers' working places and introducing assistants to principals.

For the time being, the main weak points are identified in the excessive fluctuation in the curriculum staff, thereby undermining the effort that is invested in the creation of awareness, knowledge and skills and which decreases or disables the implementation and the multiplication effect of the achieved knowledge. Consequently, the desired impact of achieving measurable indicators for influence on the building of multiethnic cohesion is disabled and a question is raised about the implementation of the methodology for monitoring and evaluation, as well as the competences and authorizations of the municipal educational inspectors. This refers to the scope of work of assistants to principals appointed in some bigger schools and principals in schools which a priori deal with issues of minority communities and integration, currently only in "numeric terms". What is missing is a clear definition of the tasks of these positions in the part of building interethnic cohesion, where the desirable level is a higher transparency and responsibility in the process of their appointment and providing departmentization of the school management and operation of the school boards where the parents are members.

The data from the report named "Bridges and Divisions in Education" of the OSCE Mission in the Republic of Macedonia show that the following data are available to the primary schools:

- There are 332 primary schools in the country, 48% of which in urban areas, 52% in rural
- They are attended by 200,436 primary school pupils, Of which 51.7% are male and 48.3% female
- 53% are Macedonians, 34% Albanians, 5% Roma, 4% Turks, and 4% others
- 64% of these pupils attend their classes in the Macedonian language, 33% in Albanian and 3% in Turkish

- 69% of the primary schools (holding 67% -or 134.810- of the pupils) are monolingual: 52% with only Macedonian as a language of instruction (amounting to 49% -or 98.947- of the overall pupil population) while 18% have only Albanian (amounting to 18% -or 35.863- of the overall pupil population), meaning that 74% of all monolingual schools are in Macedonian and 26% in the Albanian language
- 31% of the primary schools (holding 33% -or 65.626- of the pupils) are multilingual: 18% with Macedonian and Albanian languages of instruction (19% of the pupils), 4% Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish (7% of the pupils), 6% with Macedonian and Turkish (5% of the pupils) and 3% in other combinations.
- 73.3% of the pupils (98.947) that attend classes in the Macedonian language are in monolingual schools and 26.7% (35.863) in multilingual schools, whereas 51.1% of the pupils (35.863) attending classes in Albanian language are in monolingual schools and 48.9% (34.282) in multilingual schools.

In the primary education there are in total 200,436 pupils in 332 primary schools; 53% of them are Macedonians and 34% are Albanians, which means that these 2 communities create 87% of the total number of pupils. All pupils attend the school program in separated classes, or in numbers: Macedonians (64%), Albanians (33%) Turkish (3%), Serbs and Bosnians (1%) and they never mix. 67% of all pupils are in monolingual schools, which means that they never communicate with the children from different mother language communities in the same school environment. 33% of the pupils are in multilingual schools, from which only 26% refer to Macedonian-Albanian combination. The conclusion in this report is that half of these 26%, or between 10% and 13% of the pupils of Macedonian and Albanian community in primary education have a real opportunity for integration in the school environment in which they meet each other. That's why in our approach we do not promote any integration of separated communities, but rapprochement, association and taking joint actions in mutually important goals, recognized and chosen by the pupils, the teachers and the parents themselves.

Since 2010 until today, the Strategy is implemented with foreign support through three significant projects: 1) The Interethnic Integration in Education Project (IIEP), 2) Nansen Model for Integrated Education (NMIE and 3) "Building bridges" Fund:

1. The Interethnic Integration in Education Project (IIEP)

This project has been centrally implemented by the Ministry of Education from December 2011 to December 2015. The main goal of the project is building awareness and providing various trainings, technical support and incentives for the school boards, school principals, teachers and administrative staff for support of interethnic integration in education. The project marks the following target groups: primary and high schools, pupils, teachers, members of the schools boards, parents and local communities. Achieving of the goal is organized through activities in four components: informing the public and communities, building capacities of the school management and teachers, creating a model of schools for interethnic integration and encouraging the schools and communities through a fund for renovation of the schools.

According to comprehensions from the Project evaluation report, the undertaken activities on the level of increasing the awareness for interethnic relations and coexistence have successfully addressed the detected needs of pupils and teachers, but less the needs of parents and least the needs of the local self-government staff. At the same time, the local self-government has been detected as especially important for the sustainability of cohesion efforts on long term, taking into consideration their competences in the primary schools. The project included trainings and encouraging measures for journalists, in order that they investigate and create successful stories and news related to the project activities.

However, the crucial problem in the information sphere is identified on the level of national media where, apart from scarce efforts for positive reporting on local level through local TV stations, the approach of national TV stations puts an excessive accent on ethnic diversities and conflict, rather than on togetherness and successful integration.

Regarding the increasing of the capacities of teachers and management, the Report highlights the increased willingness of the educators/teachers to foster interethnic cooperation through extracurricular activities, and emphasizes the lack of financial support expected from the local self-government and the Ministry of Education upon exhaustion of the donators' help. There is also a resentment among the curriculum staff, because these activities are considered as free effort that is given beyond the job description. Regarding the parents, considered as a key link in the education/upbringing process, there is space for designing an approach to overcome activities focused only to increasing the awareness for interethnic relations. Further, considering the approach concept, it was detected that schools endure certain pressure for creating partnerships and mutual activities based on the curriculum language, i.e. activities are imposed with partners that use different curriculum language. This unintentionally puts pressure over schools where curriculum is performed on languages of the minorities, thereby losing the possibilities for multicultural and multi-ethnic extracurricular curriculum integration of schools where curriculum is in Macedonian language, and there are children from other communities, as well.

Concerning the component focused on creation of schools that will be used as an example, according to the Report, visible difference has been achieved in the integration and cooperation among pupils, teachers and even parents in comparison with the schools who were not included the project. The scrutiny of the inclusion of the parents for achieving significant cohesion change, as a culture in the relations on the level of community, has been observed as inadequate. From the analysis of the role of parents and their engagement in the part of decision-making on certain subjects and ideas that are covered through extracurricular activities or specific school events, several shortages have been noticed: lack of trust in the school by parents and school personnel about activities which aim to interethnic integration, lack of inclusion in decision-making and participation of parents through school boards, in spite of the project efforts. There is a serious issue that should be more actively considered because parents are perceived as passive observers and the methods currently applied (school boards) do not provide their essential encouragement in co-creation of the integration, thus losing an important ally in decreasing of the social gap based on ethnicity at individual level.

2. The Nansen model of integrated education

It represents a new model of education in the Republic of Macedonia targeting pupils, parents and teachers from different ethnic communities through modern educational process. This program has been implemented since 2007 in 12 primary schools through the Nansen dialogue center. The model supports integration of pupils' belonging to different ethnic communities, which attend the curriculum process (each in their own mother tongue) in same school building and in the same shift. Series of modules have been established and trainings have been organized for teachers and parents with the aim of enhancing their knowledge and skills in the process of integration and creation of cohesion in the community. The developed programs are integrated into an online platform, through which experiences can be shared and didactical resources can be downloaded. The programs are developed in correlation between the contents from official curriculum programs and programs for activities of informal, extracurricular character with bilingual approach and game method.

3. The “Building Bridges” Fund

The Fund is intended to encourage proactive generation of ideas from the stakeholders on local level, namely municipalities, schools and teachers together with the pupils and parents in multilingual schools or twinned monolingual schools. The activities encouraged by the fund vary from organizing events by the municipalities with the inclusion of all schools in the municipality, up to mutual preparations of the pupils for an activity related with a certain vital need or interest, for example: IT workshops, fashion events or DJ sets, as well as actions including teachers' and parents' initiatives for extracurricular activities.

Detected weaknesses in the implementation of the Strategy

From the aspect of the approach and abundance of developed methodologies and programs, it is questionable how much are the parents, pupils and teachers included in that process in a creative and original manner and whether it is in reality just another didactically created substance without the participation of the target groups themselves. Is this approach, ultimately, limiting the freedom and to what extent it allows originating and spontaneous taking of an initiative which would be experienced, suggested and created by the community, thus increasing the trust and self-encouraging the efforts and responsibilities for a greater interaction?

In order to have a supportive environment, the Strategy for Integrated Education lacks an established Communication Strategy to which all actors on national level and, especially on central level – the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister for the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, would be committed. Such a Strategy would be a guideline and an encouraging constant value for all activities in the schools, including media which can have a huge influence upon the public and the parents. Namely, it would mean that the overall efforts would not be promoted only as an activity, but would essentially help in changing the public awareness in a way that the target groups i.e. teachers, parents and children will be publicly encouraged and motivated by the higher goals presented through the voice of the political actors, as well.

There is a subtle tendency in the school boards to select parents' representatives who are well known in the community and who are, for the sake of their own personal existence, often connected and influenced by a political party (mainly the ruling ones). In such a situation, parents who are party-neutral and who have succeeded to be members of school boards on highest level and be active in the decision-making process related to catering, security and extracurricular activities, are likely to be put under pressure from the principal and have their ideas, suggestions or opinions marginalized, because of the, a priori defensive, behavior of the principal who is himself appointed by a party instruction.

Thereby, even a slight democratic attempt is suppressed from the very start by an elitist approach and it is questionable whether parents would be interested to be proactive partners, taking into consideration their fear or resignation for action due to the dominant party-political pressure in general.

The control over the contents of the books, as education tool (item 3 of the Strategy) has not been established through a consultative process outside the administrative and academic community. Respectively, there is no systematic way through which parents could give their comments on the contents or the approach on which the lectures are being created. Unfortunately, this reverse bottom-up approach faces barriers that can vary from bureaucratic to party-political nature, whilst the comments could refer exactly on clues for promoting the dominance of one religious group which is connected to the ethnicity. For example, in the textbook “Ethics of the Religions” there is controversial style of sending messages in relation to secularity, i.e. it suggests condemnation of the philosophy as a wrong manner of behavior related to the religion.

The systematic and structural weaknesses, accompanied by motivational weaknesses, are the main barriers for a successful implementation of the existing programs. These programs, apart from being subject to an excessive centralization and formalization; are further burdened with uncritical acceptance of ethnic divisions. It reflects on the major part of suggested activities which strive to, somehow, join and bring closer the separated communities, instead of trying to build a functional community. Therefore, our approach starts from a different perspective.

Key questions/hypotheses

The research team assumes that the integration of the pupils and the communities in which they live, will be increased if based on inclusive principles, implemented in practice without stressing the politicized categories of social differentiation.

The assumption is that the ecological and social issues, as well as community inclusivity is stronger than the ethno-political separations. Through practice of direct findings for the true and real dimensions of the key social problems and the role of the personal share in mutual good, the political manipulations and influences would be isolated and would enable the development of the culture of inclusivity, and not separability, as well as hierarchical social relations.

The main question is how to, efficiently and effectively, implement these extracurricular activities? Three categories of actors are direct stakeholders and we have to find the exact answer for their inclusion: 1) how to encourage the direct participants - the pupils; 2) how to motivate the main and responsible stakeholders - the teachers; and 3) how to get the consent and the interest of the parents?

Methodology

During the research we have been using several research approaches:

- For analyzing the common terms and conditions, we reviewed the existing legal regulations.
- Specifically, many active practices in the area of education whose aim is integrated education were researched.
- Despite the use of secondary sources of information, such as laws and reports, the team members made several interviews with the involved actors who are implementing these programs.

Additionally, a series of semi-structured interviews in four cities in Macedonia: Kumanovo, Tetovo, Veles and Dojran was made.

Analysis

The analysis of the collected data is primarily based on the experience of those who implement the above mentioned programs. Before we have even received and processed the data for the educational system and the different kinds of institutionally implemented programs which should lead to inclusive, instead of - probably wrongly called - integrated education, we compiled a questionnaire that was, later on, used for a series of interviews in the schools. We shall only briefly remind of the main conclusions of the conducted programs and shall afterwards proceed with the analysis of our on-site field research.

Conclusions about the implementation of the programs for integrated education in the Republic of Macedonia through secondary sources and published reports.

It is a worrisome fact that, even after 5 years of efforts for implementation of the Strategy for integrated education (through projects such as NMIE (Nansen Model for Integrated Education) and IIEP (USAID's Interethnic Integration in Education Project) as well as "The Building Bridges" Fund, it is noticeable that, instead of taking steps towards improving of evaluations of the projects, the situation is stagnating or regressing.

The weakest link in that process are the bodies on local level, namely, the municipalities that don't have capacities for a meaningful and expected influence considering the jurisdictions obtained through the decentralization process.

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) as central national institution that coordinates this process, besides the constructive efforts with the international partners on a conceptual level in the process of implementation, most often does not offer enough support, either through financial coverage or through lack of understanding for the needs, and focuses on the supervisory and punitive competences it has towards schools/teachers, scarcely learning from the stakeholders on local level (teachers and parents' boards).

This setup and the insufficient openness towards manifested needs in practice, implying that certain concepts or approaches from MES or from the municipalities have to be adjusted, creates resistance among the curriculum staff and complete de-motivation for crucial involvement in the realization of the strategic directions. Thereby, the whole investment through transferred knowledge and skills towards the teachers, leads to a weak or insufficient fulfilling of the established guidelines from the Strategy, or at least, is reduced to a technical check list.

The extracurricular activities that should basically contain upbringing elements rather than educational ones, should be planned in cooperative process in which parents have clear involvement and the process of perceiving and practicing the values is externalized inside and through the family.

Therefore, the absence or the insufficient carefully and dedicatedly outlined procedures, especially on local governments level, for bringing into life and real functional cooperation with the parents through the school boards is the Achilles' heel of the essential building of integration on community level.

The school boards, as new and fragile democratic tools, in reality very often lack a vision for their role in the school life. Very often, these boards are usurped by the daily political events on national level and are subjectively managed under the principle of fear, which often influences on the composition of the parents and their background political affiliation or party-assumed sympathy. Thereby, the creative potential is inhibited, as well as the flow of proactive free expression which can greatly support the educational process of the pupils.

In this section we have covered the systematic and organizational structure of the educational process, as well as programs that target overcoming of the existing educational and, correspondingly, social segregation. We have identified the weak points in order to overcome them in future programs. In the following section we shall focus on the experiences of the immediate practitioners of these programs and their opinion on the whole process and the effects of the programs, as well as their opinion on more efficient programs.

Conclusions based on answers to the on-site questionnaire

These conclusions are brought based on conducted field research that covered four cities. The interviews are attached to this study and were made with teachers from the primary schools in Veles, Kumanovo, Tetovo and Dojran. The information from the primary schools in Tetovo has been obtained from discussions and interviews with two female teachers from different primary schools. The same situation was in Kumanovo, while the interviews in Veles and Dojran were taken on one female teacher in primary education, each. All schools in which female teachers were part of the interviews, have a mixed ethnicity. The order of the analyses follows the order of the asked questions during the interviews, and the conclusions are derived from the summarized answers of the interviewed teachers.

1. What is the communication among the pupils from different ethnic affiliation in the school?

On this question, the teachers who were part of the research from three cities: Veles, Kumanovo and Tetovo, gave identical answers. The curriculum in the school in Tetovo is held in three languages, Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish, and the communication is on significant level. In Kumanovo participants were the teachers from two different schools. In one of them the curriculum is in Macedonian language and the pupils were from Macedonian, Serbian and Roma nationalities, while in the other school where Roma and Serbian pupils are studying, there are Albanians pupils, as well. In none of the schools intolerance, incidents and conflicts were noticed. The communication and cooperation are taking place completely normal. The same situation is in Veles. In this research we have added the school in Dojran, because that municipality has mixed ethnicity. The communication among pupils in Dojran is excellent.

2. Are there forms and types of cooperation and mutual activities? What are they, and in what extent are they implemented?

In Tetovo during the classes and in extracurricular activities, there are mutual workshops among pupils from different ethnicities. These workshops were encouraged through the realization of the project "Interethnic Integration in the Education". But, since they require big preparation and engagement from the teachers, too much material and cooperation with the parents, these activities are realized more in the lower grades than in the upper grades. This mostly depends on the teachers themselves. Those who are constantly working and keep the pace with the innovations in the educational process, gladly accept this project. In Kumanovo, a project for multi-ethnic integration initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science is under implementation, implying a cooperation with schools on Albanian curriculum language. There is mutual cooperation among Albanians and Macedonians when they realize different projects for mutual cooperation and, this year, they have started holding one mutual class. Sometimes, there are joint sports events. One educational activity of multi-ethnic character within the project was financed in 2015. This activity is taught in English language and there are 3 English teachers: one Macedonian female teacher, one Albanian female teacher and one Albanian male teacher. The attending pupils are from the fourth grade and upper, and there is a big interest for those activities, the children cooperate mutually without any obstacles and love to have fun. The same situation is in Veles and Dojran where all activities are realized together.

3. Is that enough for providing sufficient contact, introducing, socializing, cooperation and overcoming of the ethnic gap?

The general standpoint of the teachers on the project initiated by the Ministry of Education is that it is not sufficient because it covers 2 to 3 activities on a semester basis and that is not enough to overcome the interethnic gap. The activity that unites the pupils through a third language is found useful and there is a need to increase the number of activities. We also have to consider the information that the pupils from the schools in the villages Buzalkovo, Klukovec and Slivnik populated with Albanian citizens and falling under the jurisdiction of the Municipality of Veles, do not mix with Macedonian pupils; therefore, there is a need for bigger engagement in the frames of this project.

4. Is there a special attention paid on issues related to coexistence and how are they addressed in practice?

Although the annual program for the operation of some schools anticipates actions regarding the coexistence, there is a lack of continuity in those activities for achieving the desired effect. Within the main classes, there is subject on "Life skills" combined with workshops from different areas of life, thus the coexistence, as well. There are no special measures except that teachers indicate and educationally affect in terms of coexistence between the different ethnic communities. In Dojran there is a practice to visit each other on religious holidays and family celebrations such as weddings, christenings and circumcisions.

5. Do you think that extracurricular program/activity can be initiated, thus joining together children from different ethnic affiliation in mutual interest. These activities would not be imposed “measures for improving the coexistence and interethnic tolerance”, but will be chosen by the pupils themselves, together with their teachers and in consultancy with the parents.

During interviews, the teachers have stressed that extracurricular program/activity shouldn't be put as a separate activity, but as an optional subject because of the teachers' resistance towards the huge number of changes in the education. If it is put as optional subject, words such as coexistence, tolerance and etc. should be omitted, but the subject should contain all those components and should have a title that would attract both children and parents. It is noted that such an activity already exists, specifically the project of the Ministry of Education and Science, that has already been mentioned. It is questionable whether such an extracurricular program/activity for cohesion of the children from different ethnicities can be implemented in Kumanovo, given the latest acts of war in May 2015 which have contributed to increasing of interethnic distrust. Moreover, the fact that the parents of a remarkable number of pupils are members of the military forces, is an additional influence and it is likely that obstacles would appear from the parents for realization of that kind of activity. There are activities such as echo-patrol and planting trees, while other activities can be realized on children's demands. In Veles, there is an interest and need for realization of extracurricular activity.

6. Is this achievable? What could prevent and what would create a problem and why? What will be positively accepted and why?

The problem in the realization of this kind of projects is the fact that the project holder is one teacher and the whole responsibility and realization falls on him/her; besides, that teacher is responsible for other projects in the school. It would be useful if this kind of projects would start being implemented in several schools in the state. The benefits would be seen within one year, after the formation of the team of teachers, and greater engagement would be noticeable from the problematic pupils, pupils with special needs and parents as well. In one school in Kumanovo there is a section of English language that came out of a project and is led by one teacher, but he still cooperates with other teachers. This section is successful because of the interest of the pupils for the language. This could be extended to other subjects as well, but the initiative has to come out from the teachers' staff, pupils or the principal. Lack of financial assets was reported in Veles, as well as problem with free time due to the workload with the curriculum programs and plans, i.e. the Cambridge program for the group of subjects of natural sciences. Also, there is an absence of motivation except for the ethic and moral motivation and that absence is noticed among big part of the employees, as well as among parents. The children would accept any kind of activity if it goes out of the frames of everyday obligations.

7. How to realize this?

A good team is required for elaborating an action plan for every school separately, as well as intervention in the legal act that comes from a higher level and a coordinator from outside (BED, MOE). A doubt has been expressed that this is unlikely to be realized without the intervention imposed by the Ministry. In Dojran, pupils are given ideas for mutual work and they have the opportunity to decide by voting which activity is going to be realized, with participation of other ethnic communities and with a remark that they will learn something new. In Veles, on regular basis for the New Year, collecting activities are being organized in the school hall and gifts are being made for pupils from socially vulnerable categories. Collecting actions have been regularly held for old plastic, batteries and paper, together with a selection of the waste.

8. Who has to be included in the successful realization of this initiative?

A good team of teachers from different curriculum subjects, active parents, pupils and representatives from the municipality, BED and MOE, as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations and business group.

9. How much freedom do teachers have for proposing and realization of an extracurricular program?

The teachers have full freedom for proposing of extracurricular program, but difficulties can be found in the realization because of pupils being overburdened with 6 classes per day. It is necessary to inform the Educational Inspectorate and, without approval of the parents and MOE, there is no possibility to undertake that kind of activities beyond the legal frames. The proposals have to be in line with the rulebooks made by BED and MOE.

10. How big is the interest and response from the parents who are members of the school boards?

Not only parents who are members of the School board, but the rest of the parents are included in curriculum and extracurricular activities in the classes where their children study. However, their involvement greatly depends on the teacher who plans the activities and the parents' engagement therein.

11. Have teachers and parents so far proposed an extracurricular activity that has been rejected by the competent institutions (BED, MOE)? If so, what was the program?

It has never happened that an extracurricular program is proposed by the school and be rejected from the competent institutions. However, there is a small number of extracurricular activities proposed by the schools because mostly parents are the ones who give the proposals. However, unless they are in line with the bylaws, they will not be accepted.

12. What are the proposals of the teachers and parents for easier and free realization of the extracurricular program/activities?

Depending on the conditions; they can be realized after the classes, two times per week. Proposal has been given that they are realized every first Saturday in the month or two Saturdays in a month, so that children would be more mentally active and use less smart phones and play video games. The proposals of the teachers and parents vary from municipality to municipality. While in Kumanovo the proposals for extracurricular activities are rare, in Dojran parents support those activities and actively participate therein, while there are no activities in Veles.

13. To what extent is the lack of finances a problem in the realization of extracurricular programs? How it can be overcome?

It would be good to give points as an encouragement to the teachers who will be engaged in these activities. The lack of finances is a big problem, and the sponsorships of the business group and municipality will be welcome. In Kumanovo the English language section had funds in total of 20 thousand denars, but the assets have not been received until the beginning of the activities, so they realized them on their own expense. They organized a masquerade for Halloween participated by 200 children in the presence of the teachers and parents. The awards were financed only by the principal and the rest of expenses were covered by themselves. The wish and the motivation are crucial. Also, bigger engagement is necessary from the municipalities and bigger freedom of schools for disposal of the assets from their own sources, like renting of the sport hall.

We decided to present the opinions of the teachers in the most possible direct form in order to enable them, as most competent and most exposed actors in the educational process, express their own opinion. In combination with our analyses of the educational system and its social incorporation, the existing practices and efforts for integrated education and our findings on the field, we have built our final draft policy for integrated education, i.e. inclusive education.

Conclusions and recommendations

It is obvious that the implementation of institutionally imposed programs for integration of the pupils from different ethnic origins in a system which leads to ethnically segregated educational systems, faces a series of obstacles, which are from formal legal, organizational and motivational nature. During the survey of the existing legislative, literature and establishing of the actual situation through series of interviews and analyses of the programs for implementation of the Strategy for integrated education, a lot of structural and system weaknesses have been recognized. These weaknesses have to be exceeded in order to enable real, and not just declarative integration in the society. From the structural weaknesses, the segregated education stands out. In only dozen of schools direct contact among pupils from Macedonian and Albanian ethnic community is possible. That directly indicates the necessity of finding mutual activities that will get together these children and bring them into contact with their teachers and parents in the creation of a functional social community as desired. From the system weaknesses certainly stands out a big centralization and dependence of the schools from the central governments, both from financial and contents aspect. The system predicts certain freedom for extracurricular activities, but again, it has to be approved from higher administrative bodies.

With the analyses of the conditions, our assumptions have been confirmed that it is necessary to change the approach from other perspective, i.e. to offer a natural, unimposed, facilitative atmosphere in which the extracurricular activities will be planned and organized voluntarily and self-initially, thus enriching and upgrading the educational process and leading to a greater inclusivity.

Inclusivity that we stand for, is not limited to overcoming of ethnic gaps, but aims at building communities that will really actively include all stakeholders, parents, pupils, the curriculum and the professional school teaching personnel. Unless progress is made on overcoming the status differences, as a result of class and cultural stratification which coincide with ethnic separations, it will be hard to obtain integrated community.

What we offer as a subject and area of organizing the extracurricular activities, is at the same time a motivational encouragement for activating the stakeholders in the educational process, directly or indirectly. Above all, it is necessary draw the attention of the concerned public or target groups about the questions of wider social importance. The encouraging of the eco awareness through programs of primary selection of waste in the schools and homes, production of own organic food in the school or local gardens, common preparing of food – these are programs in which pupils, teachers and parents will be included and engaged. Further, the programs for inclusivity in the education, such as construction of access routes for people with special needs, both in the schools and in the community, enabling equal possibilities for education of classmates from vulnerable social categories, as well as providing textbooks and school aids, transport etc., would also include all target groups and enable above-ethnic actions and creating of an inclusive community. Finally, the programs that will come from the school ranks would advocate for resolution of problems from social nature in the wider community, such as organizing groups for help, friendship and socializing of old, incapacitated and lonely people or organizing of community kitchens and help for the most vulnerable categories of citizens will bring to an increased integration of the community.

Most of all, these programs and activities would not be imposed nor dictated as contents and programs that have to be evaluated in front of the competent bodies, but would be programs chosen directly from the pupils themselves, in compliance and under management of their teachers and councils and with the help of their parents. This kind of involvement on voluntarily bases would apply on the pupils and parents, while the investment of the teachers should certainly be properly valorised for the additional efforts and time.

The avoiding of professionalization and institutionalization, though in the frames of legal systematic solutions, will encourage and develop the awareness for mutual activity and building of an open, responsible social community in which future participants will be raised as self-conscious individuals, powerful and self-confident, reliable and unafraid of the political constructs of “the Other” and aware of the necessity for mutual help and self-organizing.

In order to complete these conclusions, we are adding the following recommendations:

Recommendations:

-The highly centralized educational system and control over the schools must allow for a greater degree of freedom and support for the bottom-up initiatives in extracurricular activities. This will allow for the development of inclusive and coherent community, rather than a mere reflection of ethno-political divisions present in the society.

-The bureaucratic and administrative procedure regulating the matters of organizing the extracurricular activities must be simplified. The Rulebook on the method of conducting of field trips/excursions and other free activities of pupils in primary schools greatly depends on the Ministry of Education and Science. This procedure should be made easier in order to open the way for a less formalized communication, while maintaining the safety remains a primary issue.

-Supra-ethnic and supra-national approach in extracurricular activities should be encouraged by promoting issues and topics that reach beyond the divisions based on ethnicity. Activities in areas of universal concern, like environment and social inclusion that emphasize solidarity and empathy, must take the place of the current “integrative” approach that makes the ethnic divisions essential.

·There should be a greater openness for ideas that are not presently stimulated within the ethno-political framework that shapes the Macedonian society.

-There should be more space for the involvement of the cooperation with other actors from the Civil Society in the municipality, stimulated by the municipality itself, like scouts associations, sport professionals associations, artists associations, environmental associations etc. However, the decision-making process should be creatively stimulated through discussions within the schools/parents' boards that should bring a decision with a minimal moderation of the school in that process.

-Municipalities must assume greater responsibility in the educational process and engage more seriously in the extracurricular activities as the single and most viable path towards the development of a more inclusive community at local level.

-Municipalities must abandon the accepted role of a distributor of block subsidies from the central government and become proactive factors in financing and encouraging inclusive extracurricular activities. A certain amount of the budget must be devoted to the inclusive bottom-up extracurricular activities and certain number of actions must be implemented in each school.

-Overall, we recommend a completely different approach towards the democratic decision-making units at the school level. The triangle teachers-parents-pupils is structurally present, but ineffective and unsubstantial in practice. Especially the Parents' Boards should gain more freedom in generation of ideas related to free extracurricular activities with minimal guidance in the ideas by the professional school staff, i.e. teachers. In these processes, the pupils must be included from the beginning and in all phases.

-Serious efforts should be implemented to make the existence of the Parents' Boards meaningful. They should be seen as democratic tools for participative decision-making in the education system and not be considered only for commercial needs related to the catering and the security of the schools within the tendering procedures.

-To that purpose, in order to overcome the lack of trust by the parents in matters related to interethnic activities, there should be a progressive inclusion of the parents in the decision-making process that will be enforced through legislative changes within the Rulebook on the method of conducting field trips/excursions and other free activities of pupils in primary school and implemented with more vigilance by the relevant municipal personnel for monitoring and the principal of the school.

-Within the Rulebook on the method of conducting of field trips/excursions and other free activities of pupils in primary schools, more space should be given to initiatives coming from the students, parents and teachers, instead of a previously approved top-down decision.

-Revision of the list of approved places and monuments to be visited. The choice on approved places and monuments which can be visited within the organized extracurricular activities and trips/excursions, should be critically revised and balanced with the secular approach that should be respected within the education process.

-Improved definition of the roles of the assistant principals and principals in primary schools. They should be the warrantor of the autonomy in decision-making process within the school boards. More precise definition of their roles and responsibilities in the matters of interethnic relations in the community at municipal level.

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