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**MODERN SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL
CHALLENGES AND PHENOMENA:
POLISH AND MACEDONIAN PERSPECTIVES**

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We are glad to present a Polish–Macedonian volume about modern phenomena, challenges and problems reviewed in social and educational perspective. The publication was prepared within the cooperation between Polish academic units and St. Clement of Ohrid University of Bitola (Универзитет Св. Климент Охридски – Битола). The aim of the monograph is an attempt to outline the most important contemporary problems, issues and also changes in the social and educational space. The authors – in the wide interdisciplinary perspective – attempt to set and confront the above-mentioned in the perspective of the two distant countries that seem not to have much in common, yet, are extremely similar and close to each other.

Macedonia is one of the youngest countries of the Balkan peninsula. This country – proclaimed a state on 2 August 1944 – was part of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia until 1991. The election carried out in 1990, and a referendum carried out on 8 September 1991, set a new direction for internal transformations and paved the way for national independence, of which the crowning moment was the proclamation of the Independent Republic of Macedonia on 17 November 1991. Currently, Macedonia has been facing a number of challenges which resemble greatly the problems Poland faced in the 1990's, right after the system transformation, gaining independence from the “block” and preparing for integration with Western Europe and its structures. These problems are, among others, connected with the young age of the democratic system, the dynamics of socio-economic changes including those resulting from country's long dependency from Belgrad. Macedonia, as a country on the edge of cultures, is characterized by diversity, rich cultural traditions, which in the context of modern geopolitics are both a capital and a load. Legacy of the ancient times and Byzantium, 500 years of Turkish reign, diverse folklore, multi-ethnic character, national identity problems – including nationalisms, problems with stabilization of the young country resulting from historical conditions and difficult neighborhood in the context of modern geopolitics – these are only some of the issues from a wide catalogue of such.

This publication is, however, not a book about Macedonia. The perspective of two distant, but experiencing similar moments of history and undergoing similar changes, countries is a point of reference for the attempts to answer the questions focused around the most pressing problems and challenges of modern times. Such an arrangement, due to the distance of 1.500 kilometers, may seem peculiar. However, as we gain the knowledge about the matter, the numerous similarities between Macedonians and Poles, which are visible in almost every sphere of life, especially in the matter of mentality become more important than geographic and cultural distance. Macedonian discourse in Poland has been carried out successfully, especially in work of professor Maciej Kawka and professor Irena Stawowy-Kawka. It is worth mentioning that in Macedonia, cultural and historical issues of Poland are not considered distant. Moreover, Poles are widely recognized and welcomed in the young country, partly because of the relations established due to crisis situations which the state had to face in the XX century. Poland was also one of the first countries that acknowledged the independence of Macedonia.

The authors of the book present the selected contemporary key problems, phenomena and challenges in social and educational space. They discuss the future and directions of development as well as dangers and threats, challenges, chances and problems in the area of modern social changes, also in the context of accession to and entering the EU structures as well as geopolitical, cultural and economic conditions both in Polish and Macedonian perspective.

The publication presents reflections, comparisons, research results and observations in interdisciplinary manner, especially in the educational, sociological and cultural space. We hope that the book will find its place in the successful and even more popular Polish-Macedonian discourse and will contribute to it.

Michał Szyszka
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Introduction

Modeling of the teaching practice by using the principle that what has worked for yesterday will work for today and for tomorrow for each participant in education opens a door for isolation of the children or students that represent different cultures. The perception of the world itself differs from one student to another depending on the cultural or ethnical background. The teaching process is shaped by the curriculum that usually and most likely represents the values and views of the dominant group. The dominant group has direct impact on the choice of the books, the textbooks and the texts that the students would be using in school, and the teaching strategies and methods or educational methodologies as a whole. Consequently we should reexamine the school practices if we agree that a multicultural society as Macedonia is, should incorporate intercultural practices that impose mutual respect, tolerance and appreciation.

The stories that the students read in the textbooks create fictive worlds that are similar to the real worlds by many things. In addition, are they similar to all potential real worlds, knowing the fact that each student is unique and therefore – not repeatable and original existence of body and thought? Are they similar to the world that includes child with satisfied existential needs, with cultural characteristics and values that are close to the mainstream culture, with family that appreciates the reading and writing, and actively engages in electronic communication and information interchange? Are those fictive worlds also similar to the real worlds of a child whose existential needs are not quite satisfied, a child whose parents are absent most of the time, a child that has only one book that has received as a gift, a child that speaks on another language – different then the majority group, i.e. a child that represents another culture, ethnic group, family with low incomes or a marginalized group by some other factor?

The students enter into fictional words when reading literary texts. In addition, if a student finds the fictional world similar to the real world that s/he lives in, then the entrance into the fictive world would be more realistic and holistic experience. However, it is very likely that the student, who

doesn't find the fictive world familiar or realistic, cannot really enter into it and grasp that kind of unreplacable experience. Knowing this, we must take the consideration of the fact that the texts that are read and analyzed in the classroom in most cases portray the real worlds of the main-stream or dominant culture. Consequently, we are asking ourselves: what can teacher do for the students of marginalized groups in order to fully experience the fictive worlds? What can or should teacher do to persuade the student whose family doesn't appreciate the knowledge and therefore - school that the literacy issues are of great importance for someone's personal development, but also – for the society development?

Interculturality: terminological determination

The term *culture* stands for an aggregation of all processes, changes and products that has emerged as a result of the physical and spiritual activity and the purpose of its existence is to ease the processes of maintenance, continuity and the progress of the human society (Илић, 1971, p.. 255-256). The culture is constituted of two essential elements:

- Transferring the acknowledged culture flaws and values, i.e. tradition;
- creating new values, i.e. progress.

The notion stated above, refers to the statement that the culture represents a link among the generations, but also is contradictory, because of its role in the transfer and creation of new goods and values (Недељковић, 1999, p. 208). The language, religion, family, marriage, ownership, incest prohibition are the main categories of the universal culture issues. In other words, the culture background is consisted of language, mythology, folklore, customs and everyday forms (Ђорђевић, 2005, p. 145).

There are no static and territorial isolated societies. Every society is a hybrid of different cultures and identities and the interaction among them becomes incredibly complex and burdened by various cultural, economic, religious and political demands. Many countries around the world have a mix of subcultures that have different values and norms then the main-stream culture (Giddens, 1988).

Multicultural societies include: various cultures, nationalities, ethnic and religious groups that live in one area. In some multicultural societies there is limited number of contacts among the participants in that society. If that is the case, the people in that kind of society have negative or at least neutral attitudes toward the differences. Consequently, the minorities are acknowledged, but not accepted and appreciated. Therefore, the multicultural society is a state, and not a process. Interculturality stands for inclusion,

cultural exchange, communication, interaction and other constructive manners of bringing people together. Hence, the multiculturalism means existence of different cultures in an area, and the interculturalism emphasizes the need for interaction among the cultures. Interculturalism represents the dynamic nature of the human existence in a society that is consisted of different countries. The intercultural identity is reflected in:

- The acceptance of the existing, but also - the new cultural elements,
- Broadening and deepening the views;
- Self-understanding, self-acceptance and self-confidence is at high level;
- Openness and flexibility at high level;
- High level of creativity that enables facing with new challenges (Kim, 1991, p. 259-275).

In the intercultural societies where various cultures are appreciated and there is an open communication and interaction among the inhabitants, there are no superior or inferior, better or worse cultures. Interculture is a process and not a goal (Kajiš, Medič, 2001, p. 55).

One of the social fields in which the interculturalism can find a place for nourishment is education. We cannot inherit intercultural values, hence it is something that needs to be learned, felt and accepted as part of our existence. In the UNESCO (1993) document titled as *Directions for educating the values that will enhance the humanistic and international dimension in education* there is a concept referred as *social responsibility* which is the most likely the most holistic concept related to the understanding and accepting the differences. The historical attempts of creating homogenous environments have always been described as failures that entailed many human sacrifices and societal setback. Moreover, the differences are not social disease that should be treated, but bright spot of the human community evolution – evidence that whereas a human exists there is also a desire for growth and progress.

In the same UNESCO document there are several intercultural principles that should be followed in order to achieve intercultural education. Those principles are:

1. Becoming aware of the cultural interactions;
2. Becoming aware of the various culture's values without hiding the dominated relations and to improve the culture of immigrants;
3. Interculturalism to be guiding principle in every school activity,
4. To question the evaluation criteria that are ethnocentric;
5. To introduce intercultural approach in all organization's and schools' domains;

6. To develop solidarity and mutual acceptance in the school community;
7. To acknowledge and appreciate the symbolic presence of the mother tongues in school;
8. To stimulate pluralistic approach in the process of learning,
9. To recognize that the arts are of great help in the process of appreciating the various cultures;
10. To encourage intercultural activities among the students and to acknowledge that they depend on the quality of cooperation among the teachers that originate from majority or minority groups;
11. To enable communication among school, family, environment and the whole community (migrant and domestic);
12. To acknowledge that the intercultural education brings the future that is equally important to domestic countries and the foreign countries that have its ethnic minorities in other countries and seeks for solidarity among the countries with different status of wealth;
13. To develop at teachers the necessary skills and competencies that will provide these principles to become efficient practice.

We conclude, here, that the principles for building intercultural societies are widely accepted in paper. Therefore, we should all be aware of the need to employ our consciousness in order to become better citizens that will contribute to one's well-being during the process of self-realization.

Critical literacy: terminological determination

The idea of critical literacy has been impregnated many years ago as part of the ideologies of many great thinkers. Still, it is concept that has been brought to the world recently by recognizing the need for redefinition of what we mean by *literacy*.

In the past years the concept *literacy* was defined by identifying the one's skills for doing something in societal frames, but without any relation to the contexts that the literacy practices can take place. At the beginning, the literacy was meant to represent one's ability to read and write. This determination was broadened by adding different skills such as ability or competence for adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing numerical data, or communicating by using numeric data, and oral competencies.

Later on, as a result of the New Literacy Studies movement, the term literacy is adopting different methods and terminology. According to Street (2003) the traditional understanding of the literacy is alike the autonomous

model for literacy acquisition where the literacy and its manifestations don't depend on the context in which they emerge. Consequently, the literacy is a mechanical process of developing skills that could be implemented everywhere. The new understanding of literacy which Street names as ideological model stresses the importance of the context that the literacy practices are exercised in, because the literacy skills and its manifestations are social practices that are dependable on the specific situations and sets of circumstances. Therefore, they include certain ideological implications on the individuals that are engaged in literacy practices. Family literacy and functional literacy appears as terms that only point out the social orientation of the literacy practices influenced by the New Literacy Studies.

Driven by the need for recognizing different ways of sign representation and different ways of communication, a term multimodal literacy is coined whereas the possibility for communicating by using signs of various sign systems is welcomed. The concept multiple literacy arises from the need to read the world in many contexts that as a result of the technology revolution and the human society development have become more complex and unpredictable. Therefore, we can make a distinction among math literacy, political literacy, health literacy, economic literacy, media literacy, critical media literacy,... critical literacy.

Critical literacy has arisen from the Dewey philosophy of education, post-structural philosophy, critical social theories and the Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed. Dewey (2008) stresses the point that the process of thinking is shaped by the one's experience and that the human is responsible for his own actions, and therefore for his process of learning. *Thought or reflection, ... is the discernment of the relation between what we try to do and what happens in consequence. No experience having a meaning is possible without some element of thought* (Dewey, 2008)... *Not knowledge or information, but self-realization, is the goal. ...Learning is active* (Dewey, 1902).

Critical literacy comprises treating the text as a product of certain social and historical conditions, hence the reader does not seek the real meaning of the text, because there is no such thing (the post-structuralistic influence), but the reader reconstructs the meaning itself once again (the author has made the first construction). Under the manifested structure of the text there is a hidden structure that needs to be questioned (influence of Derrida). The reader should ask him/herself about the author of the text, the purpose of the creation of the text, its role, the way of its construction, alternative views that can contribute to the overall impression, the individual use of the read text, creating alternative texts as exploring the inter-textual connectedness to the original text and fostering creativity and creative writing. Critical literacy teaches that people should be conscious about their own position

in the society and the position of others in the social hierarchy (influence of the critical social studies) in order to protect themselves from being exploited and not accepted. Paulo Freire (1970) speaks out for creating a world whereas all people will be equal. He also stands for dislocating the power (the empowerment of the marginalized groups in the society), providing access to education for all, educating by giving freedom to think, act and gain knowledge in the process of active learning by becoming responsible for self-development. Freire emphasizes the importance of taking initiatives by engaging reflection and action. The main condition for educating critical citizens is making them believe that they should become very self-conscious and conscious for others. Critical literacy represents developing consciousness for self-identity and socio-political worlds at the individual by reconstructing the texts (oral and written), reflecting and acting in order to address the requirements for providing social justice.

Fostering interculturality by implementing strategies for critical literacy development

Lately, there are many voices raised for equity in many spheres in the society, for accepting the multicultural nature of one's society, for providing atmosphere and practices in the spirit of interculturalism, for enabling education for all, for inclusive education in a very broad sense etc. But, in spite of the constant strives of the teachers and the policy makers there are still many situations of inequity in education. ...*There are structural and cultural contexts, including inequitable access to resources and institutionalized racism, that problematize the concept of the achievement gap, but these differences in academic performance still carry significant social, economic, and political consequences* (Morrell, 2009, p. 96).

There are many implicit aspects of the teaching and learning processes that can be linked to the cultural and inclusive education issues. Karen Gallas (2000) informs about her failure to motivate little Denzel (7 years old African-American pupil) to read and write or even to listen to the story that someone else is reading. At the beginning, she thought that the child originates from poor family in which the value of the book is not recognized, but that wasn't the case: his parents were well situated and had university degree. Then she thought that maybe he hasn't got love in the family, and again she was wrong: little Denzel was loved by his parents and closest ones. After many attempts and strategies that she has implemented in order to motivate him to read and write, she found out that she has adopted not suitable approach to enter the Denzel's world that was quite different then she could imagine. In Denzel's world, shaped by the African syncretic art

as part of his culture, the book should be used as a tool for learning to read and write, but not to read stories. According to the Denzel's perceptions, the story should be told, not to be read. Story telling as an activity enables the listeners to enter into the new creative worlds of fiction, by the power of the spoken word, music, dance, and drama. Reading would mean death for the story, because of the lack of the magic spread by mimics, gesticulation, singing and dancing. Knowing this, Gallas could understand Denzel's constant resistance to the story reading activities, at last. Therefore, she introduced herself with her pupil's culture and considered more suitable teaching and learning approach to the reading process.

Ladson-Billing (1995) points out the non-correctness of the educational methodologies that teachers use in their classrooms, because that kind of approach cannot be used for paying attention to the cultural differences among the students, i.e. there is a cultural mismatch in schools. In addition, she notes that the constant low school performance of the African-American students is not related to their mental capacities, but to their position that they have in the broader social environment as minority and marginalized group. Ladson-Billing proves that the school performance of the students will improve if the cultural aspects of the Afro-American are respected and appreciated and stresses that the previously used terminology for this cultural mismatch pointed on the extent of unsatisfied accommodation of the marginalized groups to the main-stream culture. *Only the term culturally responsive appears to refer to a more dynamic or synergetic relationship between home/community culture and school culture* (Ladson-Billing, 1995, p. 467).

Young people, nowadays live in a quite different world then their teachers' world. This is pretty much shaped by the information and Internet revolution that have provided real access to many sources of interest. Therefore, the practitioners realize that there is a constant decrease of the academic performance of the young people related to the new technology emergence. There are also subcultural issues that impact the academic performance. Ernest Morrell (2002, p. 72) agrees with the most New Literacy Studies theoreticians that *...often, the failure of urban students to develop 'academic' literacy skills stems not from a lack of intelligence but from the inaccessibility of the school curriculum to students who are not in the 'dominant' or 'mainstream' culture*. Morrell has tried working with nontraditional poetry texts (used rap songs in contrast with traditional poetry) in order to motivate young people to learn, think upon their thoughts and actions, and find themselves in the society that appreciates them, and not makes judgments about their social beings. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2005, 2005/06) introduced popular culture into the curriculum in order to attract youngsters' attention and to develop critical literacy.

Campano et al. (2013) put accent on the importance of critical literacy development for human relations' development. In the spirit of mutual care and love they have come with the term coalitional literacies which are necessary for building up human social environment in which the human personality will be loved, appreciated and respected.

We define coalitional literacies as critical social practices whereby community members enact language and literacy across cultural boundaries in order to learn from others, be reflective with respect to social location, foster empathy, cultivate affective bonds, and promote inclusion in the service of progressive change (p. 315). Coalitional literacy practices involve constantly questioning whose perspectives are included, excluded, or given more weight, what our own status is vis-a-vis those with whom we work, and how intellectual authority may be (re) distributed more equitably (p. 324).

From the Campano et al.'s (2013) determination of the coalitional literacy we can conclude that it is a kind of critical literacy practice that relate and bond people, feelings, thoughts and actions by creating cross-cultural friendships and blocking the stereotypical thoughts. It includes practices that foster empathy and 'joint work for common community goals'.

The relations in whom there is unequal allocation of power are not likely to be obvious in every context. By providing equal access to the education system for all children in a society, doesn't mean that we have made them subjects whose rights are guaranteed. The children that represent minority group in a society, bring specific culture elements into the classroom (traditional songs, oral stories, traditional dances, specific clothing, specific manners, ideology,..). On the other hand, the school, according to the national curriculum, exposes all students to the songs, poems, stories, plays, music, texts that represent the dominant culture. These practices make the minority group believe that the types of the texts that are in the official curriculum and are analyzed in the classroom are valuable for reading and appreciating, and the rest of them (i.e. the traditional elements of specific subculture that are excluded from the official curriculum) have less or no value. Also, the students might think that the behavior that have been portrayed in the texts of analysis is acceptable, good, positive, appropriate and the other views that are excluded – are not acceptable. It is not unlikely that the students – representatives of the minority group will identify with the dominant group, because they might be embarrassed of their own true ethnical and cultural background.

In a critical literacy classroom the main aim is to put the student in an active role and to make the student feel as important part of the community. The classroom is a multicultural community in which interculturality should take place. In a critical literacy classroom the subjects that are partici-

pating in the process of learning are important structural element. The students are active subjects that are engaged in self-realization by being conscious about their own position in a group and the position of the others as well.

Since literacy acquisition includes reading, writing and analyzing texts, critical literacy puts the text (written, oral and represented by images text) in the center of the activities. The form and the content of the text depend on the author's position, the intended meaning and the purpose of the text, which will be determination of the language used for representation of the main ideas (specific choice of words, sentence organization, images and described contexts). Because the texts are ideological constructs, in the critical literacy classroom, the teacher will ask questions like these: Who is the author? What kind of language is used? Is the author trying to convince us to believe in something? If yes, what is it? Whose voices are present, and whose voices are excluded in the text? Whose perspective is been taken when telling the story? While the students understand how the language functions and what its power is, the teacher can introduce writing of alternative texts that are similar to the original ones. Writing of alternative texts as part of the reconstruction methods encourages the students to change the original text by changing some of its parts. This is an opportunity for the marginalized students to speak with their own voices on their own way. By co-writing the texts other alternative worlds in which the marginalized people live are open for exploring, experiencing and appreciating. This practice will enable minority groups recreate their own self-esteem, because they will understand that there is not only one right path to choose in life, or there is not certain way for one to behave, but there are various paths that one can take in order to reach self-actualization and self-completion depending on the set of moral and ideological principles that a culture or a subculture constructs on a conscious or unconscious level. Therefore, the teaching process that involves critical literacy practices becomes closer to the students themselves; because they will feel that they are seen as very important subject that are empowered to think critically, to stand upon their views and believes and to take initiatives for changing the worlds they live in every day.

Conclusion

Cultural values usually serve as driving force for people's behavior and actions. In a multicultural society that has embraced the intercultural principles, cultural values of the various cultures and subcultures are seen as something that enriches the spiritual coexistence. It also strengthens peo-

ple's moral qualities, because of the basic cultural values that unifies and brings together people of many subcultures such as: love, forgiveness, appreciation, positive thoughts and mutual respect. Education that is organized for developing critical literacy makes the student to be active participant who is responsible for his/her own actions and learning. Critical literacy, also, enables the students to reconstruct the meaning of the text which is a step for empowerment, because every human has a right to interpret texts without being told what to think. Critical literacy asks from the students to be more critically involved when reading texts and to explore the other readers' point of view, which helps in developing and maintain interaction and communication among people from different cultures, i.e. to promote and practice interculturality. It also provides circumstances for appreciating the human itself, regardless the majority or minority group belonging in a society. Therefore, education for critical literacy development creates an atmosphere of belonging to a whole group whereas mutual respect, intercultural dialogue, love and care, appreciation of attitudes and thought take place and individual differences and similarities are seen as advantage.

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