

## Identity, Multiculturalism, and Interculturality in School Textbooks

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### Abstract

Living a more and more diverse world involves teaching the students how to solve cultural issues, through knowledge and dialogue. Therefore, the secondary school curriculum proposes an identity and intercultural competence that should prepare students to deal with cultural diversity. As the competence is new for the Romanian Language and Literature teachers, their points of view are divergent. The present paper explores the relationship between identity, multiculturalism and interculturality, the cultural dialogue strategies one can find in secondary school textbooks. It investigates the meaning of identity for the textbook authors, the kind of diversity they picture and the specificity of the cultural dialogue.

Keywords: identity, multiculturalism, interculturality, school textbooks, cultural diversity

### INTRODUCTION

When the Romanian Ministry of Education changed the school curriculum in 2017, the authors introduced a new skill, *Expressing linguistic and cultural identity in a national and international context*, in the Romanian Language and Literature curriculum for secondary school students, besides the traditional ones, concerning the use of spoken and written language. It was a turning point, acknowledging the role of Romanian Language and Literature in identity construction and multicultural/intercultural teaching. The students were supposed to learn about their own identity first, in the fifth grade, about the national one connected to the identities of other communities living in Romania, in the sixth grade. From the seventh grade, the curriculum suggested interculturality exploration so that in the eighth grade the students could express their point of view on the relationships with the Other regardless of proximity. Therefore, in the fifth grade, the curriculum suggests that students should be taught personal identity, national identity, cultural and linguistic diversity, and behaviour patterns and heroes. The sixth-grade curriculum indicates that teachers should include values and ethics, the importance of the Romanian language in Europe and the Romanian communities abroad as well as Romanian-specific values. In the seventh grade, students learn about Romanian and European mythology, the language and the culture of the neighbouring countries, and cultural contacts. The methodological suggestions go further and recommend that this competence should be developed through group projects that enhance the role of the birthplace and community, the country, the myths, customs, traditions and practices, the language and what it can teach us about us and the others, values, models and heroes. All of them are explained in the school textbooks. There are fifteen secondary school textbooks for Romanian Language and Literature, most of them are for the fifth grade (seven), and their diversity of opinions shows the difficulties that the authors meet in finding methods and texts to teach identity, diversity, cultural contacts, multiculturalism and interculturality.

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As the competence is new for schoolteachers and textbook authors, the present paper investigates its understanding in school textbooks.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present study uses the comparative approach of school textbooks, establishing the main tendencies in understanding competence, the suggested methods for developing it, the texts they use to explain the realities and facts, feelings and emotions towards one's own identity and the otherness or cultural contacts. To this end, all school textbooks have been studied, from the ones for the fifth to eighth form, as well as the curriculum for the same grades. The study aims to investigate the way that the textbooks' authors understood the skills and how they applied the curriculum's suggestions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The concepts of multiculturalism, interculturality, and cultural diversity do not have a long history as other research ideas but reflect a reality of our contemporary world, even if in the early 1990s, some scholars objected to the type of education provided to minorities in the United States, underlining that they receive a European education instead of African, meaning that they receive the values of the main population. The concepts have been theorized to describe the dynamic of a complex environment, where people move from one place to another, work in international companies, and live together with people they never knew before. The research and the political concerns about mixed populations also served in the places and countries with multicultural populations, reflecting their problems and searching for solutions. The concepts have been introduced as a response to a political need in multicultural communities, recognition of minority rights and undiscriminating treatment, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, habits, customs, traditions or language. Multiculturalism is a politics implying recognition, equality, and freedom from domination, as Thomas Seally [1] underlines while establishing the features of the concept, contact zone, civil inattention, contact and power and sensorial contact, establishing that they can be met in everyday multiculturalism. The scholars speak about two kinds of multiculturalism: everyday multiculturalism which refers to a plurality of feeling, thinking, doing, and speaking styles and political multiculturalism which aims at the mutual recognition of each other's culture and rights in mixed communities. As a political concept, multiculturalism is supposed to explore the culture of the minorities or populations sharing the same space, even if they speak different languages, and share different values, religions, habits or customs. It is connected to another concept, cultural diversity, which means the coexistence of at least two cultures. There were two approaches to multicultural policy and education: the disadvantage approach, a policy that understands the disadvantage of the minority compared to the majority, which led to positive discrimination, and special rights offered to the minority members, and the second one, the enrichment approach that refers to exploring and achieving competence in both cultures, in order to understand each other. But multiculturalism wasn't enough to promote the dialogue between the minority and majority, or between different groups. Therefore, another concept and policy was needed, and this was interculturality. While multiculturalism is an American concept, the Europeans introduced interculturality, considered first a synonym for multiculturalism. However, interculturality assumes more than

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exploring the others' values and customs, it implies identifying common values, customs, and ceremonies that can be the foundation of the intercultural dialogue. While multiculturalism ignores the interconnection between communities, minorities or other groups, interculturalism refers to comparisons, cooperation between the groups, and sometimes confrontation, but its goal is to promote cultural changes.

Cultural contacts are usually associated with violence [2] therefore, intercultural or multicultural education is an attempt to change this natural ethnocentric inclination into a new approach, freed from anxiety and from avoiding intercultural interactions. This kind of education is of so much importance that scholars speak about intercultural literacy. Therefore, more and more scholars suggest models of intercultural education that start from cultural awareness to cultural sensitivity to reach intercultural competence. One of these models, the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, built by Milton J Bennett, quoted by Fiona Maine and Maria Vrikki [3], there are six stages in learning one's culture: denial, defence and minimization, as ethnocentric orientations, and acceptance, adaptation and integration as the experience of the other's culture. While the first three imply a central culture, whose values, habits, customs or traditions are dominant, the last three stages are more diverse, difference is gradually accepted, respected and valued. One's own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures.

Intercultural competence is defined by Deardorff in 2006 as "the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes", apud Fiona Maine and Maria Vrikki et alii [3], allowing the exchanges of opinions, ceremonies or ideas between different culture. It is a prerequisite for the intercultural dialogue. As is written in the text quoted before, intercultural competence is needed for intercultural dialogue but by participating in this kind of dialogue the students foster their intercultural competence. It leads to sensitivity and adaptability to others' cultures and different cultural contexts, engaging communities in dialogue and learning from each other. The main goal of intercultural education is "to eliminate prejudice and racism by creating an awareness of the diversity and relative nature of viewpoints and thus a rejection of absolute ethnocentrism; assists people in acquiring the skills needed to interact more effectively with people different from themselves" [4]. As interculturality is an ambitious socio-political proposal that wants to reconcile individual rights and freedoms and social life, the interactions should be in terms of equality, mutual respect, and understanding of each other's values. But traditionally, these interactions take place on a plane of inequality, dominance and ethno-racial hierarchy. Therefore, intercultural competence is a "twenty-first-century necessary skill in the sense that it allows people to face multiculturalism in a constructive manner" [4].

In order to teach intercultural competence, the school should abandon the single approach to cultural education, even if applying compensatory teaching, to enhance minorities' civil rights. As said, "democratic school attendance and so-called "compensatory" teaching were not sufficient to eliminate the inequalities found between ethnic groups" [5]. In our complex and diverse world, intercultural competence could be associated with school effectiveness. Intercultural education could improve the teaching-learning processes because attention to the school's cultural diversity could lead to a diversity of methods and strategies and even to a more personalised educational process.

The UNESCO Declaration of Cultural Diversity (2001) establishes that cultural diversity is a factor in the development and increase of creativity, therefore an action plan

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with several measures is suggested. Among these measures are “promoting through education an awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity and improving to this end both curriculum design and teacher education” [6]. This leads to intercultural education, whose aim is to preserve the cultural heritage and value cultural diversity. The offered intercultural education is supposed to be respectful and to use practices from the community’s own culture.

In light of this Declaration, intercultural competence should start from the definition of culture, as “the set of meanings (beliefs, values, views of the world) shared by a group that leads to the interpretation of reality”, proposed by Carmel Camilleri [4], and the ethnicity, “the cultural practices and perspectives that distinguish a particular community of people” in the terms of Anthony Giddens [4]. Transcending the models of cultural assimilation, appreciation of other cultures, bicultural education, and socio-critical approach, the development of intercultural competence leads to a new view of the world and a new humanism. Therefore, it can’t ignore the community’s best practices that should be included in the educational national system. Many times, the national educational system raises obstacles to an authentic dialogue through its vision of teaching and learning and even its teaching-learning methods and strategies. This is why the Romanian Language and Literature Curriculum introduced a fifth competence, concerning identity exploration and intercultural dialogue development. The present paper analyses the Romanian Language and Literature Curriculum in light of identity and intercultural competence, to find out what are specific skills, pedagogical contents and methodological suggestions of the document. It explores the way the schoolbooks operationalize them, to understand the methods and the strategies that Romanian schools use to teach cultural diversity, multiculturalism and interculturality.

Several ideas operationalize pedagogical contents in the study of identity and multiculturalism/interculturality in school textbooks. The curriculum suggests that the skills should increase from the fifth to the eighth grade. Therefore, the curriculum envisages two specific skills for each age level, which increase as the students grow up: the first skill starts from *associating own life and reading experiences with those from other cultures* in the fifth grade to *investigating Romanian customs and traditions and those of some ethnic communities living on the Romanian territory*, in the sixth grade, *comparing the Romanian traditions with other cultures’ traditions*, in the seventh grade and *expressing a point of view towards the values of the national culture or another culture, identified in the read books*, in the eighth grade. The second skill follows the same path, increasing from the fifth to the eighth grade, but suggests identifying, analysing, comparing and defending a point of view regarding their cultural values and the joint outlines they find. In the fifth and sixth grades, the focus is on identity construction, though cultural diversity is not ignored either. In the seventh and eighth grades, the main debate is on multiculturalism and interculturality. The pedagogical contents follow the same path: students start from the birthplace, family, and community debate, together with childhood image, friendship as an important value, mother tongue, traditions and holidays as expressions of one’s identity. In the seventh and eighth grades, pedagogical contents tend to favour the intercultural dialogue: cultural contacts, common traditions and their dynamics in different communities, comparisons of students’ values with others, the study of influences of other cultures on the students’, international behavioural patterns, cultural archetypes, etc.

The schoolbooks follow three directions in developing the curriculum skills: constructing/investigating one’s identity, observing cultural diversity and analysing forms of interculturality. The first of them is the construction of the students’ identity. It starts in the

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fifth grade, by exploring the person and the family, then, in the sixth grade, the curriculum moves to national identity, traditions and myths. The approach is different from one schoolbook to another: in the Booklet [7] schoolbook, identity starts from the story of one's own name, family members, mother tongue, and physical features; the ArtKlett [8] schoolbook suggests that emotions shape one's own identity and personality, therefore it moves from emotions to values, using support texts. For the Corint Logistic [9] schoolbook's authors, the person's identity is shaped by the connection with the forefathers: the study starts with the founders of a family or nation, involving also the Romanian ethnogenesis. The Litera [10] schoolbook investigates the identity issue through the book reading, as a way of self-knowledge, therefore the importance of self-image and self-esteem is enhanced. Other schoolbooks, from Intuitext [11], CD Press [12] and Editura Didactică și Pedagogică [13] suggest discussions on the same issues, underlining the importance of the family, values and traditions. Some of the textbooks broaden the discussion from the personal identity issue to the national identity, through the debate on the ancestors' importance, on the national values, and so on. In the sixth form, national identity is the main issue. Thus, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică [14] schoolbook debates folklore values and language's place in Europe, the people that speak and learn Romanian; in the ArtKlett [15] and Aramis [16] schoolbook the national identity is explored by studying the national myths and other Romanian mythology elements, while the Intuitext [17] schoolbook focuses on legends as national identity foundation.

At the same time, all textbooks explore other issues, such as multiculturalism and interculturality, though they don't distinguish between interculturality and multiculturalism, nor define the concepts. The main concern in the school textbooks is to underline the importance and richness of complex and multicultural cultures. The books start from the concept and the reality of cultural diversity as can be portrayed in fictional writings and journals. Cultural diversity is studied starting from the cultural behaviour of European children from different countries. The Booklet [18] textbook suggests good manners and customs as well as New Year's Eve traditions, all of these are correlated to diverse aspects of the national identities of French, Italians, and Japanese, compared to the Romanian traditions and customs. The Art Klett book starts with the definition of cultural diversity, but their approach is more intercultural, as the students are invited to find common themes in the peoples' traditions, like the outlaw motif in the Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, Bulgarian or Albanian folklore, cultural models, like Nastratin Hoge's, in the same cultures. Moreover, the textbook connects cultural diversity with national identities, differences and inclusion strategies, as the games the children play. In the same textbook, students can learn about minorities living in Romania, through an excerpt from Ioan Slavici's journal, „Lumea prin care am trecut”. As an application, the book suggests a project, where the discussion about minorities starts from national fairy tales – Hungarian, German, Ukrainian etc. Other textbooks investigate cultural diversity through the image of the Roma population in Vasile Alecsandri's „Vasile Porojan” (Litera textbook), foundation myths and the comparison between fictional characters, like Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer and Ion Creangă's Nică a lui Ștefan a Petrei (CD Press).

The school textbook multicultural/intercultural debate is complex and somehow vague as the study is often mixed with other concepts. Nevertheless, the schoolbooks propose several texts concerning populations living together. The main themes are cultural contacts: capitals of culture, community values in Romania, the influence of cultural contacts and the

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cultural diversity on the community's life, like traditions and customs that were taken over from one population to another (Art Klett textbook). In terms of cultural contacts, the Aramis textbook focuses on Romania's neighbours and their idioms that had an important influence on the Romanian language, the shared values and the personalities that shaped the community values. The seventh-grade study focuses more on multiculturalism than interculturality, as students learn about minorities and people sharing the same space, but not the same values. The students explore the cultural features of the others, learning about their idioms, their holidays, traditions, customs or other cultural features.

In the eighth grade, the study is more oriented towards interculturality: students learn about intercultural friends, like Ioan Slavici and Bartok Bela (Art Klett textbook), Antoaneta Ralian and Iris Murdoch (Corint textbook), shared values and customs, as the ceremony of the fire, and Romanian international values. All textbooks suggest that the foundation on which shared values are settled is Greek mythology, where the students can find behavioural patterns that shape the values system and the cultural world as we know it: the myths of Prometheus, Theseus, Perseus, Heracles, Castor and Pollux, Philemon and Baucis and so on. Some ancient myths and heroes are related to the modern ones – like Superman reminding of Heracles and Spiderman of Arachne.

Literature is the foundation on which the study of culture and values is settled. The chosen literary texts are from Romanian literature such as Ioan Slavici's „Lumea prin care am trecut”, Vasile Alecsandri's „Vasile Porojan”, Dimitrie Bolintineanu's “Mircea cel Mare și solii”, „Despre prietenie și dragoste” by Ioana Pârvulescu, „În Ajun de Anul Nou” by Fănuș Neagu, „Enciclopedia zmeilor” by Mircea Cărtărescu, „Legendele Olimpului” by Alexandru Mitru, excerpts from the works of Lucian Blaga, Ion Minulescu, Grigore Vieru, Nichita Stănescu, Alexei Mateevici, Tudor Arghezi, Alexandru Philippide, from world literature, like Charles Dickens's “A Christmas Carol”, Mark Twain's “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer”, Antoine de Saint Exupery's “The Little Prince”, or Romanian and international legends and fairy tales.

The most frequent methods used to teach/learn intercultural content are debate (on more than fifty occasions), role play, storytelling, brainstorming, or other, mainly active methods, while most schoolbooks use multimedia to explore minority cultures, especially the customs and holidays, personalities, and idioms.

The viewpoint that stands up to the whole information is the Romanian space, with all its challenges, with the Romanian language at the centre of the pedagogical approach but considering the minorities that live in Romania, like Hungarians, Germans or Roma population. Their traditions and holidays are explored, but also the influence of their idiom on the Romanian one, especially on the vocabulary. Also, there are scarce references to European culture, habits, customs or holidays, like the children's habits in France or Italy, to the international culture, like New Year's Eve in different countries of the world.

## CONCLUSIONS

The teaching/learning process, as well as the schoolbooks, starts from identity issues, inviting students to explore their family, community, ancestors, as persons and as ethnic groups. Students learn about their values and customs that shape a unique way of being in the world. Then the study enlarges to the multicultural debate, where different communities are portrayed, in order to understand the values and the specific way of being of each group.

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Investigating the textbooks, one observes that the identity debate is complex, researched through different themes like the family, the ancestors, the legends and the fairy tales, the churches and other buildings, the visual arts and poetry or literary/fictional works. Romanian myths are also thoroughly analysed through the identity lens, with excerpts from scientific and folkloric works. Cultural diversity is associated with multiculturalism, helping the students realize that they live in a diverse and complex cultural world. They learn about the populations that live in Romania, but everything is focused on Transylvania, ignoring other important (not necessarily manifold) populations living, for example, in Dobruja or Banat. Even if the southwestern zone of Romania is well represented through Ioan Slavici's works, Dobruja is left aside, yet it is the most culturally diverse region of Romania, where Turks, Lipovans, Tatars, Ukrainians, etc. live. The cultural diversity of Dobruja is more complex than others, as one can meet different religions in this space, with their specific architecture. Therefore, the schoolbooks do not consider religion as a value or a specific aspect of identity.

Interculturality is poorly represented in the schoolbooks. Almost all of them place the Greek model at the centre of the study, sometimes with contemporary connections. Some try to identify common motifs or models, such as laws, customs or language influences. Other comparisons and forms of intercultural dialogue seldom appear, as if the authors were afraid to address real problems or debates.

In other words, the schoolbooks respond to the need for identity investigation of the students and favour the learning of multiculturalism, mainly of the Hungarian and German minorities, but not other significant minorities whose contributions also shape contemporary Romania. From an intercultural point of view, the dialogue is slightly open, according to the students' age characteristics and knowledge. In terms of competence, students learn about the existence of some minorities in Romania, their language, cultural features, habits, customs, holidays, and ceremonies. They learn to identify them and how to apply this knowledge while interacting with their Other, but they are not able, according to the pedagogical content, to integrate the information, to live and work together with culturally different groups. As the curriculum and the schoolbooks stipulate a concentric development of the contents, it is expected that this cultural dialogue should develop in the high school years.

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