

„IT WAS HEARTBREAKING” – The Discrimination in Our Schools

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Abstract

In this paper I present the aspects that lead to discrimination. I have analysed at concept level, the intergroups attitude components, the stereotype, prejudice and discrimination, like a russian dolls Matryoshka, as Adrian Neculau defines them. The stereotype represents the first puppet and belongs to the strictly cognitive component, because it refers only at a set of beliefs regarding the object or the person in cause (Neculau, 2004, p 262). The next puppet, the affective component, is the prejudice. The last and the most dangerous one is the behavioral component, discrimination, which grows on fertilized land by the negativ stereotype and prejudice.

The discrimination problem has been seen based on some criterias: racial, health, physical appearance, parental status and disabilities. Thus, this is not a full picture, but an uderstanding of some of the most important discriminations patterns from the country. For each criterion addressed, we broad to light the ways manifests and how it affects the children in the future. Finally, several steps have been recomanded, meant to fight the discrimination and to promote the equality.

Keywords: discrimination, matryoshka, prejudice, stereotype

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1. Overview of discrimination in education

Education is a right that each children have, and school should be a place in which all should try, together, to pass all the barriers that keeps them apart.

But in most Romanian schools, especially in the last couple of years, tolerance and acceptance is not that often, making room for discrimination and stereotypes, things that are painful for some students.

The values of education without discrimination, are mostly moral values.

We cannot speak about education without this axiological dimension of our personality. Maybe the most proper definition of education in this context is the one given by Kant: „the man path through humanity”. Maybe more than any other educational components, the multicultural component must definitely be supported by the family. Most of the times, the children arrives in preschool or school with they’re own stereotypes.

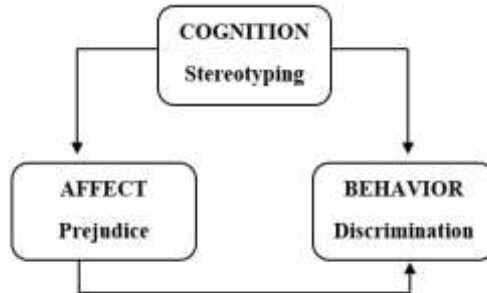
If in the past most of the school were „mono-cultural islands”, where the only point towards diversity was trough the geographic and history books, today, the schools share the same diversities as the societies that belongs to.

The children sharing a class with other different race kids. Therefore it is absolutely necessary to teach them to accept and cooperate no matter of race, color or they’re looks.

1.1. Following the path to discrimination

This three concepts represent the ABC - affect, behavior and cognitiv - of the relations between two or more groups.

Figure 1. Relationships among social groups influenced by these components



1.1.1. Stereotype

The cognitive component in our perceptions of group members is the stereotype - the positive or negative beliefs that we hold about the characteristics of social group (Bourhis, Leyens, 1997, p. 98). In another words, our instinct is to judge a person by their social group or category, without looking at the personal qualities.

Sometimes it does happend to have an opinion about someone before ever meet him. Imagine, that some day, at school, you meet three new classmates. You see that one of the is skinny, wears glasses, looks shy and is not very well dressed. Probably the first thought will be that the new classmate is a nerd. Second one is a kid dressed all in black, long hair, wears big boots, even if it's warm outside, by the looks makes you think that he's a rocker. Third one is a girl which is very carefully about the way she looks and that will make you think that is arrogant and shallow. In each situation, you've formed a opinion before even speak with you new classmates. You counted only on they're looks, well...that's a stereotype.

We may decide that “French people are romantic”, that “old people are incompetent” or that “the persons with disabilities are helpless”, we may use those beliefs to guide our actions toward people from those group.

1.1.2. Prejudice

In addition to our stereotypes, we may also develop prejudice. If discrimination would have been just as a stereotype follower, she could've been defetedad only by changing our way to see the other

people. But not only that, alongside the way they think about the others, we must keep interest in their feelings towards different social groups. A second path that leads to discrimination is well paved with prejudice: an unjustifiable negative attitude toward an outgroup or toward the members of that outgroup (Myers, 2009).

In conformity with Vander Zanden (1994), prejudices represents an attitude of aversion and hostility against the members of a group, from the simple reason they belong to that group and thus its supposes that they have the negative characteristic given to the group.

Moving forward with the given examples, we can obviously see that we're not going to stop at only tag the new classmates as "nerd", "rocker" and "shallow", and these three persons that we don't know yet, will wake up some emotion reactions inside of us. Maybe from all of them we'll empathize with the "nerd", because we can win something, we can use him when we need him. The rebel one, is going to be invisible or nice because we may share the same love for the music, while the shallow will be unlikable, because seems to be presumptuous and arrogant.

According to Whitley and Kite (2005, p. 103), there are numerous types of prejudices: racial prejudices, ethnic prejudices, prejudices concerning the age, prejudices concerning the social status, prejudices concerning the membership to a certain group.

The stereotypes and prejudice appear very early, sometimes even before 4 years. „They arer not born, but always learned, from the outside (school, mass-media, family), own experiences" (Chelcea, 2008, pp.344-345). If were to ask a child who is the better driver in the family, he'll answer with: Dad, but if we'll ask him who's the better cook in the family, he'll answer Mum.

The stereotypes and prejudice are not necessarily verbal shared, but very often trough the observation of the way in which the important persons act in the presence of other minorities. For example, the parent who holds his kid stronger when he sees a gypsy kind on the streets.

1.1.3. Discrimination

„IT WAS HEARTBREAKING” – The Discrimination in Our Schools
Cristina Mihaela ZANFIR

According to Myers (2009), the negative behaviour built on the result of the prejudice is named discrimination. If prejudice is just a predisposition to action in a certain way, discrimination is the behavioural part of prejudice, is the translation of the mental attitude in real act.

Discrimination means action, a specific behaviour pointed against the interest of a person based on irrelevant criterias. Tough discrimination is forbidden by law, it's got, even today, a legal definition. In Romania, according to the art. 324 from 14 July 2006 from the law, discrimination means „any difference, exclusion, restriction or preference, based on racial reasons, nationality, language, religion, social category, convictions, sex, age, disabilities, chronic contagious disease and any other criteria whom purpose are restriction, removing recognition, usage or exercising, in equal condition, human rights and of fundamental freedom or the rights given by the law, in public department, economic, social and cultural or in any aspects of public life.

Barbara Flicker (1990) sets four main types of discrimination:

- **direct discrimination** in schools is when a child is treated less favourably on the grounds of gender, disability, race, physical appearance, religious belief or age. For example, a student is expelled after everyone finds out that she's carrying the HIV virus or a disabled child is being rejected the application to go to a normal public school, although his intellectual level would pass the school requests;

- **indirect discrimination** intervenes when a criteria, one practice apparently neutral put in a bad situation persons that belongs to a vulnerable group, towards some other persons from the majority group. For example, the valuation of students is made considering money given to school fund or acquisition of some didactic materials;

- **harassment** can occur when a school engages in unwanted conduct related to a criteria of discrimination (ethnicity, gender, disability) which has the purpose or effect of violating a pupil's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the pupil. A student is repeatedly ridiculed of the other classmates on his ethnicity or his financial state, but this is ignored by the teachers and school board, for the reason that “they're just kids, they're playing”;

- **victimization** – refers to protecting the people from any consequence (expelled, dismissal) as a reaction to a complain, action

or other procedures that aims compliance for the principle of equal treatment. The mother of a disable student, sick of the harassment that her son was put up every day at school, decides to complain to the school board. Shortly, after the investigation and sanction of the responsible person, the student finds himself with his behavioral grade dropped and after a little time expelled. Other students which fight against discrimination are intimidated and have no more courage to make other complains about further abuses coming from classmates or even teachers.

1.2. Forms of discrimination – vulnerable groups

1.2.1. Racism

We see the everywhere and we recognise them fast. We avoid them and we hide away our wallets. We threat our children that if they don't listen we'll give them away to the gypsies and we raise them as far as we can from them. About them, there are many many legends, that they're unwashed, thieves, beggars and they hate to work. I have brought gypsy race because, unfortunately, in Romania is the most usual category to stereotypes.

According to „Free yourself from prejudice” guide (2008), are exemplified the differences between the three types of racism.

Individual racism - expression of attitudes, values and person beliefs about the superiority of own race, ethnicity or culture.

Visible: One student accuses the other gypsy classmate that stole his phone, because “everyone knows that gypsies are thieves”.

Hidden: One student refuses to move with another classmate who's gypsy, saying that he doesn't see very well at the table.

Institutional racism - discrimination made within the schools premises or another organizations which have the power of influence life of many people, by adopting laws and practices which cause racial inequalities.

Visible: Gypsy students are separate from the others, beings brought together in the same class.

Hidden: In the schools that exists a large number of gypsy students doesn't exist any of their parents in the administration board of the school.

Cultural racism - traditions, habits, values and the social behavior norms that promote own culture as a standard in society.

Visible: False presentation, based on negative stereotypes of minorities, in the media.

Hidden: A school textbook which is focused only on national history, but overlook the history of ethnic minorities.

1.2.2. Sexism

Sexism is an attitude or prejudice about superiority of one sex over the other one. (Curic, Vaetisi, 2005)

Starting with the first day, girls are different from the boys through their pink clothes. As they're growing, people expect them to be good, conscientious and kind, as for the boys, they're a bit more rough, and always getting in trouble, but they get easy just because „this is how the boys are.” (Balică, Fartușnic, Horga, Jigău, Voinea, 2004)

When the children get to the school, girls are encouraged to learn more foreign languages, humanistic ones, as for the boys to lean on maths, physics or chemistry.

School's materials are full with feminine characters that have the usual characters of mothers, grandmothers, basically just at home, watching the kids, cooking, laundry, as for the masculine characters are presented as working man and good providers. Also, all the fairytales are full of princess which the most valued quality was the beauty, and the prince who are strong and brave. These models are internalized by the children, which makes an important factor in modeling their behavior and social life and professional life expectations. (Leonte, 2010)

The gender stereotypes are not a problem until they influence the important decisions that we take in life or represent a constraint in building our personalities. Gender stereotypes are the one that punish a girl who plays football and climbs into trees as being „tomboy” or a boy who cries or is passionate about dance as being „pussy”. They're to blame when a girl is being discouraged to choose like an engineer career, because it is a man's job, or a boy being blamed because he wants to be an artist. (Ștefănescu, 2003)

1.2.3. Discrimination of persons with disabilities

„IT WAS HEARTBREAKING” – The Discrimination in Our Schools
Cristina Mihaela ZANFIR

The disabilities persons which live in Romania feel prisoners in their homes. Simply the infrastructure when has been designed, it didn't include their special needs. No pedestrians paths, no ramps for wheelchairs any many others. Basicaly at the present time, they're sentenced to stay home. All the studies shows that there are to few children integrated in normal schools, and this aspect it will cost us in the future.

All these aspects reveals that in romanian society, the minorities discrimination is common. The discrimination victims have a larger risc of social exclusion and poverty.

In the absence of some real government strategies, chances of social integration of disability persons are dropping considerably. Thus it's not surprising that the number of persons with disabilities that are not going to school it's seven times bigger in compared to the normal people that are not going to school. As much more severe is the disability, the education level drops considerably, and school abandon after the 4th grade is twice larger than the common population.

1.3. Bullying - a consequence of discrimination

The bullying phenomen referes exactly to these intolerance manifestations. In his book „Bullying at school: what we know and what we can do”, Dan Olweus gives us the most complex definition of bullying phenomen:

„A person is beeing bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed repetedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.” (Olweus, 1993, p 9)

These kind of behaviors includes: teasing, nicknaming, threating, spreading bad rumors, with the intent of damaging the other persons reputation, exclusion from play group, ironic comments about religion, physical looking, physical aggression and many more.

Emotional damages caused by bullying, no matter of their nature – either ethnical, or phisical aspect, behaviour or special educational needs, can produce the slowing down of the school progress, absenteeism and can even end with suicide. Offending and repetedly humiliation leaves marks on the personality development and

„IT WAS HEARTBREAKING” – The Discrimination in Our Schools
Cristina Mihaela ZANFIR

emotional, relational competence. Each day experience into a school who fails to satisfy the needs of confort and phisical safety and emotional, grows the probability to live with anxiety, and the continuu desire of beeing accepted in the powerfull groups. (Withson, 2017)

2. Choose to care: ways of combat the discrimination behaviors in school environment

To remove a behaviour, it's important to undestant what makes him and what effects does it have, conscience or unconscience, for a child. If we succeed to remove the causes, or we try and work effects areaa, that behaviour can dissappear. The understanding of a child of his own mecanisms that triggers and strengthen the behaviour is important to make him change. Many times, beahaviours have emotions bases, and kids can benefit of help to express their emotion other then problematic behaviours.

Creating a security and constructiv enviroment, which encurge disscusions on delicate subjects. This kind of debates must follow a set of rules: all participants are treated with respect, only the opinions can be contradiced, not the persons, decisions must be argumented, all participants must have the occasion to express their point of view, questions must be encouraged; set a cod of conduit; encouraging the students trough the students parliament or the board; strengthen of the school-family partnership, by requesting the parents support in organising curricular activities and extracurricular about the fighting discrimination; giving support to the students that belong to vulnerable groups, acording to their needs. organising activities to stimulate reflection and critical thinking of student, like: debates, case studies, life experiences relates, active involving in fighting campaigns against discrimination, stereotype analise presented by massmedia, theatre and art expresions; breaking down the stereotypes and prejudice trough practice activities.

Many times, when we're not the discrimination victims, we prefer not to get involved, but this kind of attitude makes us accomplice to discrimination and puts our own rights in danger.

As a primary socialize domain, educational institutions are responsible for setting some models and standards of interpersonal and groups relations. Promoting respect for diversity, equality and undiscriminating trough education is, thus, a key-factor for building a calm society, in which people with diverse origins can develop their own potential. For this object to be touched, national authorities must make sure that diversity is being respected and promoted on all the years of school, as a structure that plays a vital role in forming the next members of society.

Accepting the difference of other implies the fact that equality is not synonym with homogeneity or capping on the same level. Admitting this fact is essential if we wish to grow this positive attitude towards the one that are different. It is important to understand that differences do not impoverish society, on the contrary, are a real source of enrichment.

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„IT WAS HEARTBREAKING” – The Discrimination in Our Schools
Cristina Mihaela ZANFIR

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