

Open Society Institute - Institute for Educational Policy

Nador u. 11, H-1051 Budapest, HUNGARY – tel: 36-1-327-3862; fax: 36-1-327-3864

Multicultural Education and the Education of Minority Pupils

Discussion Paper

Christina McDonald, Péter Radó, Hristo Kyuchukov

May, 1998

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	p.1
2. Goals of the Paper.....	p.2
3. Problems Which Minorities Face in Education: An Overview.....	p.2
4. Different Approaches to the Problem.....	p.4
5. Integration/Assimilation.....	p.4
6. Open Society Education.....	p.5
7. Problems in Education: Majority and Minority.....	p.5
8. From Problems to Strategy.....	p.7
9. Modes of Operation.....	p.8
10. Some traps to avoid.....	p.9
11. Questions for discussion.....	p.10

“Silly a school this is, everyone’s silly. They don’t even give me home-work. They don’t teach me anything. I’m not going there anymore.”
(Hungarian Roma first grader in a special school, Bianka Kun)

1. Introduction

Minorities exist in countries for several reasons: ethnic minorities may have immigrated to a country - usually for economic reasons - and have since been assimilated into the host societies. The Germans in Romania or Ukraine are a good example of this. Some other national minorities have not the consequence of any migration process, but have been created by peace treaties that have changed official boundaries. An example of this would be Ukrainians in Poland. On the other hand, a minority group may not fall into either of these categories, their situation being altogether more complex - for example the Gypsies or the Jews. Though many other definitions may exist, in this paper we propose to consider as a minority an identifiable group or community of peoples whose own perception of their nationality and/or whose language differ from the dominant group within that country.

Under communism, the Gypsies were considered neither an ethnic group nor a nation

Regardless of their beginnings, minorities all over Central-Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States (CEE and NIS) have suffered considerably in the past: many of them continue to suffer in the present. Especially in this region, nationalism has throughout the years consistently overridden principles of international solidarity, political universalism, and multiplicity, and has repeatedly caused people to "disregard other's claims to justice, or reason, or a common morality." As a result of this, we continue to witness a disturbing resurgence of xenophobia, ethnic bias, and racism which often results in violence.

Ethnic conflicts and racism are partially a result of the division of societies, along ethnic group lines, to form the new nation-states (for example after the first world war). However, an number of other factors are also important. For example, the enduring and profound economic problems which have followed the end of Soviet political and military domination in the region and which have had the consequences of intensifying competition for scarce commodities, the rescinding of restrictions of free speech and association, and the tendency to seek scapegoats in difficult periods.

It may not be a surprise, then, that one of the first of IEP’s Discussion Papers is about multiculturalism and the education of minority students. The importance of the topic is well justified by a whole range of considerations. For example:

- The issue of minorities is very politicized; in several countries this topic is among one of the central issues of politics. A state’s treatment of minorities often influences inter-state relations and also the chances of these countries to be integrated into the political and economic structures of Europe and the developed world. Therefore, the education of minority students is one of the most sensitive questions in the region.

What minority groups exist in your country?

Do they share the same rights and living standards as the rest of the country?

- The treatment of minorities is a “litmus test” by which the openness of a society can be measured. In the long term, education and media are the most effective devices by which the acceptance of minority rights and tolerance toward minorities can be strengthened.
- Education is one of the most important vehicles by which the integration of minorities into mainstream society can be promoted. It has a special importance in cases such as Roma when exclusion from society causes social deprivation. (See discussion of integration/assimilation below).

2. Goals of the paper

This paper’s goal is to invite open discussion with and between the Soros Foundations. These Foundations exist in thirty-one countries covering a vast geographical, cultural, political, social and economic range. With this in mind, the only common feature among these countries is a diversity of diversities: minority groups’ relationship with society differs from country to country. Furthermore, the implications of a states’ educational policies may not be the same for each minority group. The educational needs of Jews in the Baltic states, Russians in Kyrgystan or Kazakhstan, Roma in the countries of the Balkan peninsula, Tatars in Ukraine or Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin can hardly be compared. Nor do we attempt to develop a taxonomy or any kind of description by which the problems of all kinds of ethnic minority groups or the patterns of inter-ethnic relations and state policies can be analyzed.

This paper does, however, often highlight or use the Romany minority as an example for several reasons; this minority is socially and economically the most disadvantaged minority group in many of the countries of Central-Eastern Europe, and its relationship within current educational systems manifests in low achievement and dropping out, results of a malfunctioning system.

Our goal is to contribute to the development of a holistic and multicultural framework for the problem. This paper, therefore, has several purposes: it attempts to raise the issues regarding the education of minorities which are often neglected; it attempts to present the current situation regarding this issue in a way which is at once clear, but which does not hide the intrinsic complexities of this issue, and begins to explore the concept of Open Society education and education that is multicultural.

3. Problems Which Minorities Face in Education: An Overview

In all the countries of CEE and NIS minorities face problems regarding their education despite national laws (which exist in some countries but not all) or international treaties ensuring their rights in education. As discussed above, the diversity of ethnic groups is vast in the countries of the Soros Network and ethnic groups will interact and react differently to education.

Despite this variety, the difficulties which all minorities face in education can be related to *ethnicity* or *not related to ethnicity*. For example, children belonging to a minority may not have access to education in their own language, clearly an ethnic problem while others may not have access to a school due to poverty. This is not an ethnic problem, but a socio-economic one.

Genuine ethnic problems can be divided into three areas: *language*, *culture*, and *discrimination*.

a. In *language*, legal frameworks which restrict mother tongue and bilingual instruction in schools present a serious obstacle. Even where the law allows minorities education in the mother tongue, there is often no knowledge or infrastructure for mother tongue or bilingual instruction and sometimes implementation is impeded for other reasons. In addition, when learning in a second language, minorities are often at a disadvantage if methods training, a revised curriculum and appropriate textbooks have not been provided. Other obstacles to proper language acquisition are the lack of resources for materials development, low prestige of the minority language, narrow space for everyday and formal language usage in the minority language, and little free cultural exchange among host and mother countries.

Minority children do not have access to their history, culture and traditions in educational programs

b. The *culture* of minorities is very often not respected in most countries of CEE and NIS and minority children do not have access to their history, culture and traditions in the educational programs. Nor do majority children receive information or knowledge about minority culture. The result is a mutual lack of knowledge, and too often, prejudices in the majority group persist. (The above problems refer to the content of education, extra-curricular activities, how education can build on the services of cultural institutions, and lack of multicultural and intercultural programs.)

Do minorities in your country have equal access to and equal provision in education as majority children?

c. *Discrimination* is a problem that all minorities face. In education, it is most acute for the Roma community and manifests in several forms such as *segregation*, *detrimental pedagogies*, and *racist behavior*. The *segregation* of Roma students in the educational system is very often the result of a “ghettoization” of Roma in settlements and neighborhoods of cities and towns. Schools in these settlements are often considered “Roma” schools and have poorer conditions and quality than other schools. In other cases, Roma pupils are segregated to the schools for mentally handicapped, so called “special schools.” Within the existing school systems, Roma pupils are placed in “special classes,” or Roma children are placed in the back of the room and forgotten there. These examples do not refer to the separation of the children justified by Romany language mother tongue instruction. *Detrimental pedagogies* have a rich set of techniques such as different standards for assessment, lowering of requirements, different treatment of the children, etc. *Racist behavior* is very often not the result of overt racism, however, it can be caused by the low level of consciousness of ethnic problems or by the lack of knowledge on conflict resolution techniques, among other things.

4. Different Approaches to the Problem

The educational problems of minorities can be and are approached both by minorities and majorities in different ways. The most common approaches in CEE and NIS are the *social*, *human rights*, *multicultural* and *nationality* approaches:

- The *social* approach regards minority groups, especially the Roma minority, as marginalized social groups. From this point of view, education is nothing more than the condition for success in the labor market.
- The *human rights* approach focuses on the lack of equal treatment and equal chances. According to this interpretation, the most important reasons behind school failure of minority children is discrimination.
- The *multicultural* approach considers the problem as a matter of interethnic relations and focuses on cultural and social psychological problems.
- The *nationality* approach regards minority groups as political entities and focuses rather on their level of autonomy in the educational system than on minority-specific content in education.

In addition to the approaches discussed above, majority groups too often approach the minority issue with stereotyping, clichés, and prejudice whether consciously or, more often, unconsciously. It is important to emphasize that though these approaches are very often controversial and regarded as mutually exclusive, in fact, they are all valid, and respond to important human and minority rights and to concrete educational needs as well.

5. Integration/Assimilation

It is our belief that the most important goal of the Network in this field is to promote the *integration* of minorities, something which the countries of CEE and NIS have historically failed to achieve - they were unable to provide individuals and groups with choices other than the alternatives of total assimilation or total rejection and marginality.

Integration allows for cultural "pluralism" and solicits tolerance from the dominant group that allows the subordinates to retain much of their cultural distinctiveness. It is a socio-structural process which supports peaceful cohabitation and the retention of separate ethnic identities. Assimilationist policies, on the other hand, seek to merge the minority members into the wider society by abandoning their own cultural distinctiveness and adopting their superordinates' values and life styles. Unlike integration, assimilation is a psychological process whose result is the outright absorption into a dominant group with subsequent loss of ethnic distinctions.

It is our belief that the most important goal of the Network in this field is to promote the *integration* of minorities

Contrary to the notion of assimilation is the political concept of cultural pluralism or multiculturalism which fosters cultural differences and co-existence of groups of various backgrounds within the same national borders.

Therefore, integration and multiculturalism may co-exist.

Do you agree that the integration of minorities is an

6. Open Society Education

At the heart of the Open Society's Mission is to help develop the structural elements of an open society: a democratic state under the rule of law; a vital and thriving civil society; a business community that is not corrupt and that is independent of the state; and people who have an ethical commitment to the values of an open society.

One cannot imagine the process of creating open democratic societies without an education system which mirrors and exemplifies the same process. Equal rights and equality in education for minority pupils is at the core of that democratic vision.

In considering the implications of the mission for educational programs, it is possible to produce a range of questions reflecting the above concepts and which can be used to assess whether an initiative is central to our mission: Does education provide equal chances? Is it able to maintain and strengthen social cohesion? Does it provide access to pupils from different ethnic backgrounds (or social, religious etc., though the focus of this paper is on the situation of ethnic minorities)? etc.

Also at the heart of the Open Society Mission in education is the extent to which initiatives and programs are sustainable. Will these initiatives make a lasting impact on educational systems?

Open Society Education, which we may also say is "education that is multicultural" is good education which will benefit both majority and minority pupils. Unfortunately there are types of education which fail to address many of the issues that arise in heterogeneous societies. "Education that is multicultural," on the other hand is pro-active and focuses on alleviating differences caused by dominant and superordinate group relationships which are inherent in society. It permeates all aspects of schooling. It has such characteristics as: the native language, values and culture of the minority group become accepted and gain legitimate status in the curriculum. Students from both the dominant and the minority groups through exposure to each other's cultures gain knowledge of the minority group's way of life and sufficient understanding to prevent or combat prejudice; a multiperspective approach to the content of education is practiced.

Does your Foundation run education programs which promote concepts of education that is multi-cultural?

7. Problems in Education: Majority and Minority

In considering the above, in Education for an Open Society the education of majority pupils is just as important as the education of minority pupils. In fact, many of the problems which exist in society can be confronted and potentially combated by focusing on the education of the majority.

The most serious problems which exist in a society's **majority** population and which has serious consequences on minorities are negative attitudes (lack of tolerance, prejudice, racism and antisemitism), a lack of basic information about minorities, discrimination (segregation or assimilating policies), lack of prestige of minority languages, and a lack of preparation in teacher training and materials in combating racism.

The downward spiral of underachievement, disempowerment, social exclusion leading to increased underachievement is greatly determined by the expectations which a child's teacher has for him or her.

Problems regarding **minority** pupils in education are a bit more complex and may be looked at on a *school level* and on a *systemic level*. Regarding the *school level*:

- Teachers' low expectations determine children's school achievement.
- Children of minorities are oftentimes socially disadvantaged. Many come from

extreme poverty and cannot afford to buy clothes let alone school supplies and other items necessary to attend school. Such social conditions also affect their access to schooling (cannot afford the bus fare if they live in extremely remote areas), and equity too.

- Primary schools have extremely strict curricular requirements and many minority children do not have the support at home to complete homework etc. Also concerning curriculum, minority groups are often excluded from content, a factor which is particularly alienating for the minority child especially when research shows that children engage more willingly in school tasks when their own cultures are reflected in the curriculum, and especially in the materials they use in school.
- Schools in general have difficulty adapting to changes, a necessary course of action for providing the right environment for scholastic achievement.
- Schools often isolate themselves from the minority communities whom they serve. There is little dialogue between the two spheres and parents of the minority children are often alienated or excluded from their children's schooling process.
- Teachers and students themselves often do not communicate due to cultural difference.
- Schools often place the blame for school failure on the parents and children of minorities themselves, rather than looking at school or systemic issues.

Regarding the *systemic level*:

- Legislation in certain countries also compounds the problem of access to education. For example, a Romanian education law states that a child who leaves school for three years (many economically underprivileged students may leave school to help support their families) may not re-enter the system. This policy has created a huge number of children virtually without education and with no options for the future.
- Children's failure in the existing system, the factors of which are touched upon above, often leads to their segregation into separate schools and classes. Therefore, many children with "difference" are virtually ghettoized into special schools for the mentally disabled.
- For children who fail in the regular system, there is no alternative system (second chance schools or combined educational models) to support their inclusion and continuation of schooling.

- There is a lack of quality adult education programs to provide opportunity for people who may have left formal education before the end of compulsory education.
- Many of the education systems are centralized which does not allow for schools and classrooms to adapt to the different lingual and cultural composition of its students. Furthermore, autonomous minority education is often unsupported by centralized systems.
- There is no an institutional framework in place for the development, assessment, evaluation and professional support of schools educating minority pupils.
- There is a lack of systematic pre-service and in-service teacher training for teachers of minority languages and culture, or teacher training which addresses the issue of tolerance, multiplicity, racism. etc.
- There is a lack of well-developed teaching materials and methodologies for instruction in the minority languages.

8. From Problems to Strategy

The problems mentioned above may easily be “translated” into needs that Foundation programs may respond to. But, in fact, it is not possible to respond to all needs; not only because some of them should be handled only by state policies but also because the resources available in the Soros network are not sufficient and not all responses to the needs necessarily fall within the mission of the Foundations.

The diversity of problems should also be taken into consideration. Even if the above described problems can be regarded as typical, the weight of each can differ from country to country or even from settlement to settlement. Therefore, in the strategy building process, even a well elaborated overview on the problems cannot replace a *preliminary needs assessment*.

The most important question is, how to develop a comprehensive approach to the educational problems of minorities which would at once address social problems, human rights, cultural needs and the autonomy of minority groups. Foundation strategies may address three domains:

1. *Multicultural education*: programs providing knowledge on the history, culture and basic information about the ethnic groups living together in the society and focusing on the strength and value of cultural diversity. Such programs also focus on a better understanding of societal phenomena like prejudice, identity or ethnic conflicts, and promoting respect and tolerance.
2. *Intercultural learning*: Programs for pupils learning together in the same school or classroom designed to promote mutual understanding and respect.
3. *Minority education*: Programs providing language acquisition and knowledge about their own culture and history of minority pupils strengthening their identity and self-esteem (teaching minority languages, bilingual program, program with minority language instruction).

What are the most important needs in relation to the education of minorities in your country?

Is your knowledge of those needs based on instinct or a needs assessment?

In the case of marginalised and socially excluded minorities, it would be valuable for programs to include educationally related social support such as scholarships, food, transportation or social services such as access to medical care. Multicultural, intercultural and minority education programs may also be combined with remedial elements. (There is a broad variety of pedagogical devices to offset social inequalities. Although this problem is crucial for several minorities and “deserves” a separate discussion paper, it is out of the topic of this paper.)

The effectiveness of these programs may be strengthened if they deliver the necessary services for school level implementation (i.e. educational “packages” of curricula, materials and training) and broader dissemination (i.e. publications, training of trainers, cooperation with pedagogical colleges, program descriptions and evaluation, etc.).

9. Modes of Operation

The effectiveness of minority education programs depends not only their content but also on how Foundations run them. In this section we offer a few considerations based on the experiences of Foundations with a relatively long “history” in the field.

Often Foundations issue a call for proposals and grant projects in certain areas. While this can be effective in some ways, in the field of minority education (such as the education of Roma or Crimean Tatar students) there are major obstacles to this type of operation. The most important among them is the low absorption capacity of schools; giving money to schools without technical support does not ensure quality of programs. In general the educational institutions of the region - especially in periods of educational transition - are capable of absorbing practically any call for project-type support. At the same time, schools targeted by Roma educational programs seldom develop programs of appropriate quality and in the appropriate amount.

Another common feature of education of minorities is the relative lack of materials, text books, in-service training courses, expertise, etc., available for schools. It is because of this that the education of Roma and other minority children can be developed with pro-active programs. Several Foundations are aware of this problem and strive to maintain an equilibrium between grant giving and operational elements of their programs. (Some Foundations work much more like institutes rather than foundations, which creates tensions in staffing.)

Since Foundations do not take over state responsibilities in education yet focus on grass-root level initiatives, spreading the results of projects is crucial for the sustainability of programs. Programs should be designed and operated in a way which ensures systemic impact. For example the creation and support of networks instead of targeting individual schools better serves to promote sustainability and systemic impact. Also, supporting the development of pedagogical services facilitates the dispersal of work produced by Foundation programs.

10. Some traps to avoid

In the last two years several Foundations have attempted to develop educational strategies relating partly or entirely to minorities. In regards to these developments, among the successes we have been able to identify some typical “traps”. Though it is sometimes impossible to avoid these traps, a better understanding of them may contribute to the success of the strategy development procedure in the future.

Trap 1. “Project driven strategy”

Foundations begin projects prior to overall strategy development. When they develop a larger strategy, they often simply generalize the objectives of individual projects.

Trap 2. “No Pruning”

If the Foundation develops a new strategy and the projects they run do not fit, Foundations do not cancel the projects or re-evaluate them.

Trap 3. “Instinct guided strategy”

One of the largest obstacles to the efforts of the Foundations to develop educational strategies for minorities is the serious lack of basic information due to time pressures (“you have three days to write something”) and lack of opportunities to gather and conduct research. The minority educational programs are sometimes based on instinct rather than on real knowledge of the problems. This may allow the opportunity for clichés and stereotypes to influence these strategies.

Trap 4. “Unbalanced minority input”

Problems arise when the Foundations set goals for minorities, instead of the minorities setting them themselves. Also, problems may arise when Foundations are seen to infringe upon and threaten the autonomy of the minority group. On the other hand, it is the Foundations’ responsibility to make sure that the projects they support fit to the mission of the Soros network and the grant they provide is used in a proper way. In order to maintain equilibrium between the two requirements - when it is possible - it is useful to cooperate with professional minority organizations and with professionals belonging to a minority group.

Trap 5. “Ghettoization of minority programs”

In several Foundations there are separate minority programs, most typically Roma programs (in most cases under civil society development). Foundations “ghettoize” the minority issues to the minority program, even if the target group of educational minority programs may relate to a broader range of programs. (i.e. the target groups may be majority teachers or schools in general). For example, minority programs might run an educational project, while, on the other hand, the Foundation’s educational programs do not include minorities, creating a contradiction between program area and priority area.

Trap 6. “Ethno-specific objectives”

In several cases Foundations set goals for minority programs which do not fit the goals set for education in general. In other cases, Foundations lower the quality standards for minority education programs than those they follow in their other educational programs.

Trap 7. “Assimilative expectations”

Overemphasizing social integration for minorities frequently leads to assimilative expectations. It is not evident for all that educational programs which do not take into consideration the lingual and cultural background of minority pupils will fail.

Trap 8. “The money of minorities”

Foundations are often under pressure from minority organizations not to spend the “money of minorities” on majority organizations and personnel. Therefore, Foundations often simply give grants to minorities instead of funding programs for minorities.

Trap 9. “Comfortable minority elite”

Since the staff of the Foundations are not always familiar with the minority networks of the country, they find it more comfortable to work with minority elites instead of finding partners on the grass roots level.

11. Questions for discussion

There is hardly a single Foundation in the region which has not faced the problems mentioned in this paper and several have found excellent solutions to these questions. IEP would welcome comments on any aspects of this paper, including the following:

1. What are the key problems regarding the education of minorities in your country? What are their needs? How could your Foundation support those needs?
2. Are your current educational programs reaching minority students, especially those which are particularly marginalized?
3. How could your strategic planning and programming best support integration without assimilation of minorities?
4. How could minority education programs properly be positioned in the portfolio and organization of your Foundation and how can they operate in an effective way?
5. If the minority population in your country is not so large, is this a reason not to include minorities in your educational programs?
6. Is the education of the majority a vital point when discussing minority issues?

7. Which education programs of your Foundation meet the ideas of Open Society Education which are discussed in this paper?
8. Do you feel that you would need support in developing these ideas?
9. If your foundation has never addressed minority issues in education strategy and programs, what are your reasons?