The confessional – cooperative teaching Religion model in the perspective of intercultural education in Romania

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Abstract

One of the strongest arguments in favor of (re)introducing Religion as a subject of education in Romania, after a period of almost half a century of absence from curricula, it’s considering its role in shaping European culture, but also in harmonizing relations between peers of different religions, faiths, races, ethnicities, from the values they promote. The relationship between religious education and intercultural education becomes evident. More than in other subjects, in Religion case, tolerance, respect for others may become support but also object of its aims, everything bearing the seal of Love. This study wants to be a path from recognizing or not the integrative role of religion and how the cooperative-confessional teaching religion model promotes or not intercultural education. The answer is as simple to set as it is difficult to accomplish: when students acquire the attributes of a small religious community class, we can speak, at this level, of the possibility of opening students to interculturalism.

Keywords: religious education, Religion, intercultural education, confessional-cooperative model, religious community

Zusammenfassung

Eines der stärksten Argumente für (Wieder-) Einführung Religion als Thema Bildung in Rumänien, nach einem Zeitraum von fast einem halben Jahrhundert der Abwesenheit von Lehrplänen, ist ihrer starke Rolle bei der Gestaltung der europäischen Kultur und die Harmonisierung der Beziehungen zwischen Gleichaltrigen der verschiedenen Religionen, Glaubensrichtungen, Rassen, Ethnien, aus die Werte die sie fördern.

Die Beziehung zwischen Religionsunterricht und interkulturelle Erziehung wird deutlich.

Mehr als in anderen Fächern, in Religion kann Toleranz, Respekt für andere nicht nur unterstützen, sondern auch Gegenstand ihrer Ziele, alles mit dem Siegel der Liebe verbinden.

Diese Studie will einen Weg erkennen: sind oder nicht die integrative Rolle der Religion wichtig und wie das Modell Genossenschaft-konfessionellen Religionsunterricht fördert oder nicht interkulturelle Erziehung. Die Antwort ist ebenso einfach, wie ebenso schwierig sie zu erreichen: wenn die Schüler die Attribute einer kleinen religiösen Gemeinschaft der Klasse erwerben, können wir sprechen, auf dieser Ebene, von eine Möglichkeit der Eröffnung der Studierenden zur Interkulturalität.

Schlüsselworte: religiöse Erziehung, Religion, interkulturelle Bildung, konfessionell-kooperativen Modell, religiöse Gemeinschaft
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The role of religion subject in the building the present education

Lately, more and more numerous voices that support increasing the role of religious education in Romanian educational system are also raising the problem - not new in the European educational field – of its role in building education as a whole. The debates are considering on the one hand, recognizing the Religion integrator role, and on the other, placing it among the other subjects, on a place that varies by more subjective factors.

These two approaches have been supported with arguments from multiple contexts and spheres of life, the support from teachers following a path that follows an oscillating trajectory, sinusoidal limits and its amplitude varying according to the personal religious equation of the researcher and the type of state-Church relationship in different historical periods and geographical areas. For pedagogy senior representatives, which also based their educational systems on biblical foundations (and we refer here especially to Comenius, Locke, Pestalozzi, Herbart, Richter and others) as well as for some contemporary teachers, the religion value in building an education meant to address to the man called to become A MAN is more than obvious. French teacher Debesse Maurice (1903-1998) reveals the synthesis function of religious values, independent of the religious system that has generated them: „A religion, whether expressed or not in a defined confession, merges, consolidates family values” (M. Debesse, 1981, p. 107).

However, we can also note that the set model is received with great restraint by today’s society and circumvented or even unaccepted in different European educational systems, among which the Romanian one. One of the main issues addressed here is understanding the concept of secularism. “Taken especially in its extreme form, born and promoted with the French Revolution, secularism is the desire expression of identification without a rest of the public space with the profane one. Therefore, any public display of symbols otherwise profane is severely fined. In terms of this ideology, Church social committed presence is an abuse and certainly an indication of fundamentalism. While the layman apology is taken as fact for granted, Christian apology is placed at the corner, permitted in the best case” (R. Preda, 1999, p. 13).

In the current Romanian educational system, the principle of secularism was replaced with that of neutrality, the need for moral and religious education is always supported, but now it is done only during the Religion subject, being in fact considered as a dimension of religious
education. Moreover, moral education proposed by the current educational system has two components that follow two different paths: one with purposes and religious components followed by Religion subject and one with purposes and default religious/non-religious components, followed on different other subjects.

New social and historical reality, post-December, required achieving of an education with a civic character, whose content of social, economical, political expression is the value of a particular political system. The main purpose of this form of education exceeds simple understanding of the political regime governing social life, being materialized in providing support to students in employment through civic behavior in the society in which they live. Among the objectives of Civic Education and Civic Culture subjects we can identify some objectives belonging to the moral sphere. Theoretically, the objectives of Civic Education can not reach the counter with those of moral education, or with those of religious education, even if we talk about a secular state in which political power is separated from religion.

Complexity of the problems generated by more ample meetings between people or different cultures requires an extension of concerns to the whole educational system on transmission of a set of values that provides internal support to challenges of contemporary society.

In terms of intercultural education, the two approaches on the role of religion in education construction generate two different trajectories: if we recognize the role of religion as an integrator, then it has an intercultural dimension, otherwise we talk about the religious dimension of intercultural education, as it is presented in the CE documents (Conseil de l'Europe, DGIV/EDU/DIAL, 2004).

The confessional-cooperative teaching Religion model, contributing factor of intercultural education

In Romania, Religion is being studied after the confessional-cooperative religious model, the responsibility of developing official curriculum documents returned to both religion and the State (I. Horga, 2010, p. 41-42). Option for this model took into account the need to provide equal opportunities for access of all members belonging to recognized State religions to religious education. Thus, each religion has the right to teach their faith doctrine on the basis of own curricular documents, of teachers formed in their own theological schools. Following analysis of existing curricula common elements concerning the aims pursued can be identified. Framework objectives and general competences have been widely debated topics in the joint working groups
since 1998. This should be regarded as consensus concerning the name of the subject, the religious evolution of the student during school, its guidelines, which is extremely important in the context of intention to preserve their faith teachings, crystallized over time and valued in public school through joint or their own strategies by the recognized State religions.

In the media debates, a non-denominational cooperative curricular model was advocated in favor of the approach to Religion subject. Practitioners and many academics have expressed serious reservations about such an approach, given that teaching Religion is more than communicating a set of information concerning religious matters. Active involvement of religious education, including a Religion model teacher, living his faith and confession reference value represents axiological elements for students. Each Religion teacher, regardless his confession, emphasizes the importance of their faith values - stands convicted as long as it shows no proselytism and doesn't concern or encourage rejection attitudes or disregard other people faiths, but it is an evidence of understanding the mission received, of fulfilling vocation. A non-denominational approach would fall in the perspective of “learning about religion” (J. Hull, 2001), that would transform Religion in a subject of education not only neutral but also in one of a general culture, whose aims would go exclusively to information and moral-civic space, and its teaching could be achieved by atheists or even anti-religious people, followed in a later stage to be totally eliminated, after they see major overlaps with other subjects such as History of Religion, Civic Culture / Education etc.

Religious structure of classes is most often heterogeneous, with a major that varies according to geographical representation of one or other confession. In these situations, students from minority religions, in a particular academic area, most often opt for one of the following: (1) choose to participate in classes together with colleagues in the majority denomination in which case they are evaluated by teachers in class; (2) remain in the classroom but do not engage during teaching, in which religious education takes place in their school structures, usually outside school hours, in spaces of worship, the evaluation results are attested by a certificate, which the school assumed it at the end of the semester; (3) choose not to remain in class, in which parents opt in connection with the assessment.

Factors in deciding to either of the options are multiple and often related to intercultural constituents, especially if students’ denominations / religions belong to different ethnic groups or are from mixed families:

- Place of Religion in the schedule. If Religion is placed the first or the last hour in the schedule, few students of other faiths attend. If they still participate in class, the main motivation to
students in primary and secondary education is the willingness to be alongside their colleagues in all activities and those of high school with the desire to learn more of the religious field, presented in the light of other faith. Equally important is the favorable appreciation of Religion professor enjoyed by the classmates, about the attitude of being opened, cooperative, availability of analysis and different approaches of addressed issues;
- Students confessions. There is a certain tendency on detachment from the major denominations, especially of the students belonging to neo-Protestant religions or religious associations with a doctrine of the earliest historical Churches;
- The Religion teacher attitude to other faiths, to the students’ religions. In deciding to go to the class of majority confession Religion, a major role it’s given to human qualities of the Religion teacher and especially his attitude towards the values of other faiths / religions. He also has an important role in showing other denominations / religions.
- The involvement of students in joint activities of the class. Students, who want to feel integrated, attend all the activities of their colleagues, even Religion, regardless the assessment decision.
- Teacher/tutor/other teachers’ attitude to Religion subject. Students are influenced by adults’ opinion in general and educators in particular, on aspects of religious life. When they appreciate the Religion subject or they are Christians, students become more careful in making decisions on frequent Religion class.

Attendance of different denominations pupils to classes supposes respecting the principle of interconfessionality (C. Cucoș, 1999, p. 298-299) in teaching-learning Religion by concern for the presentation of common and non-divergent elements, but not deprives majority students of specific elements of their faith confession. The experience of nearly twenty years of teaching Religion in heterogeneous collective - Orthodox majority – faced us with the need to identify solutions to facilitate the integration of teaching students from other denominations, by some elements, such as: speaking of common prayer (e.g. “Our Father”, psalms fragments), emphasizing the predominance of moral issues through parables taken from the Bible or the lives of biblical characters, presenting Christian art monuments in Europe, indicating cultural influences of the neighboring peoples in the development of Romanian culture etc. Such an approach is formative for students and eliminates proselytizing attitudes, as the tendency towards fundamentalism that may arise in some situations to some Religion teachers, regardless of their confession.
Students class, community who assumes biblical values - condition for achieving intercultural education

The idea of philosopher Constantin Noica that “a school where the teacher does not learn himself it’s an absurdity” (1990, p. 27) has deep patristic foundations over time and meanings that designs for eternity the principle which is expected to underpin the relationship between the Religion professor and the student: “When one teaches, he learns even more, and when he speaks, he listens together with his listeners, because only one is the Teacher (Matthew 23.8) of one who speaks and of one who listens. He is the one who waters the mind and the word” (Clement Alexandrinul, 1982, p. 17). This text places in a special way the person of Jesus Christ in the center of religious education, the teacher being also God’s hand stretched to student to lead him to his knowledge.

This truth becomes reality through experimentation when the teacher reads the students from the Word words and feels their vibrations resonating with his soul, and together with the Supreme Master. From our point of view, living such grace weighs decisive in students option on studied concepts internalization in this subject, as such religious experiences are ways in which God reveals himself to the man - when He thinks it is the right time - like Elijah on Mount Horeb, in quiet and peace of mind (III Kings 19:12) and helps them to understand, to find themselves.

These moments of personal spiritual experience are part of God’s plan and teacher actions are often inspired by Him, to move the inner springs of students: “God’s plan that he created man for him not to die but to live forever remains unchanged. When He sees a spark of kindness in us, however small, or when He Himself makes it tough to jump from our stony heart, with generosity He protects, warms and strengthens it with his breath” (St. John Cassian, 1990, p. 534).

The three subsumed forms of God’s love to man, even with a stony heart: protection, warm and strength, must be extended by the teacher’s love to all his students, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, sex etc. We find in this text of St. John Cassian an important solution to successful education of students who exhibit unacceptable behaviors or indifference to the moral or religious values: protection from negative influences, warm from the prayer for them and with them, and strength by instilling confidence and enhancing their own spiritual becoming.

These actions from affective area involve each other, require effort and dedication from the teacher: “All occupations - and professions - they have a purpose, a plan and a goal, an end
THE CONFESSIONAL-COOPERATIVE TEACHING RELIGION MODEL IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

point, to which the one who practice any of them should make every effort to expose kindly to [...] all dangers, drawbacks to reach that end point” (St. John Cassian, 1990, p. 308). For an educator, the final point is thus the fruit of education, which most often are collected after years and years.

Thus, the role of education theorists and practitioners becomes decisive in taking and adapting educational methods proposed by the holy Church and modern and/or contemporary teachers, to harmonize the relationship between students. Often, when talking about religious education the complex reality of any class of students is insufficiently seen, which is in fact a Christian community and the relationships between students should work on including these coordinates. Such an approach shows in a different light the main tools of intercultural education represented by educational school programs and interactive activities in the heterogeneous groups (P. Batelaan, 2004, pp.7-8): development of student-student relationship from this perspective receives a principle value and therefore the whole system: analysis - educational action is based on perennial Christian values.

The fact that we are born at a certain moment in history, in a certain place, in a particular family, in the bosom of a certain religious community is a reality with a contemporary axiom value, and these elements are aspects of an ensemble that we can’t control. What is within our grasp is how we manage to be aware of not only why we were born now and not another time, why here and not elsewhere, why this family and not another, but, especially the role of our Heavenly plan, the One who cares for all our necessary perfection and those to whom we interact or whose training we influence with actions we make, actions that will remain after us.

It is really an opportunity and a challenge trying to aware the students that they did not come by chance in a certain class, that each colleague can be considered a help in his personal climbing, and in turn, he has an important role for the others salvation. Perceived this way, the subject is essential for students and the effects will be found in harmonizing relations within the team, not only in the capacity of self-evaluation and self-control. In detailing the issues outlined above, the starting point can be provided by Constantin Noica perspective that suggestively reveals the cause of disharmonies between people - the envy for the neighbor next to us: "People make children happy, wise men on crazy people, kings on poor, and the brother son on the son. What destiny always sends us to another? Not something - that could be ours - but the other” (C. Noica, 1990, p. 13).

Even if the source of envy may be material, most often students consume their energy in relationships that are scattering friends just because of that they are linked, always comparing the
other on issues relating to spiritual values. Here comes the role of the Religion teacher to help students recognize and capitalize the gifts received from God, both in personal and in relationship with others. In our view, this is the safest and most effective basis for intercultural education in school but with reference to the outside life of the youth.

Moreover, achieving the aims of religious education entails achieving the aims of intercultural education, such as: positive valuation of differences between one another by accepting, understanding and compliance, awareness of the effects of prejudice related to ethnicity, race, culture, religion, interpersonal relations, and fostering communication and cooperation between members of different socio-cultural groups are finalities of intercultural education (L. Ciolan, 2000, p.7).

Orientation of students to public awareness that each person has his own way in life - which fits only - and that temptation to constantly compare yourself with other means to feed your vanity for your gifts, the sadness of watching others gifts leads in time to understand that, in certain aspects, some of our peers are inferior and others, superior. Public awareness of their gifts is intended to be extended in some of support for groups’ members, giving and receiving the other into the other. We often find that the increased value of human openness toward to give, without action at least equal in intensity toward the aperture value is often a failure to receive in the educational plan: the one who wants to give hits the wall of the one who has not learned to receive, and the most precious gift might be to have the willingness to listen to the other, to make you share his joys and difficulties. It is the way in which the eternal human values are inclusive; they enable coexistence of different sets of cultural values, which they propose another priority than to a negative self proposed exclusive status.

The self discovery is aware not by the constant reference to others, but by building inside resorts to overcome internal or external obstacles, inherent and some even required on the personal course of human becoming. This way, wanted upward always, is not at all part of a utopia but a reality for those who are aware of the value of self-discovery and personal fulfillment in the axiological structure they teach. Among the methods that can be used in those approaches we note especially emphasizing positive characteristics of students, possible as discovering their individual potentials, especially those rejected or marginalized, in some cases identifying and valuing the positive educational aspects of their life experience.

Knowing the students becomes an essential element, favored aspect of belonging to small communities, especially in rural areas where school-church partnerships in fact prove to be more accessible and viable, but on the other hand the risk of relational fractures amid so-called local
traditions is much higher. Such an understanding of human relationships overcome the formal, the teacher of Religion is perceived by students not only an educator but also their secret confidant on the way to their own knowledge and future in relation to others. It creates the premises of building friendships between students based on virtues, the only lasting for life.

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The fundamental values of intercultural education: tolerance, equality and morality can be considered also steps in the personal religious course, which means awareness that a class of students is a significant cross-cultural reality and more, a community that takes values, including the Bible. The development of communication between people, more frequent cultural exchanges represent a challenge to Religion as a subject in suggesting those finalities that encourage the development of person’s fair relations in terms of adoption of confessional-cooperative model of teaching this subject.
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