Preparing perspective teachers for multicultural settings: the case of Roma pupils in Serbia

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Brief overview

- Roma national minority in Serbia

- Roma pupils: major challenges in education

- Teachers: practice and beliefs about Roma pupils/parents

- Student teachers (ST): beliefs/attitudes about Roma pupils

- Teacher educators/institutions: present situation

- Preparing ST for working in multicultural classes with Roma pupils: field experience and experiental learning

Population in Serbia

- Total population 7.120.666

- Serbs 83.3%
- 20 ethnical communities
  - Hungarians (3.5%), **Roma (2.05%),** Bosnac (2.02%)
  - Croats, Montenegrians, Macedonians, Bulgarians, etc. (less then 1%)

(Census 2011, Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, 2013)

Roma in Serbia

- 147,604 (2.1%) - Census 2011
- 450-500.000 (6%) - expert estimations

  (no reliable data, social mimicry, migrations, deportation from EU)

- Education

  62% without primary education

  7,8% secondary education

  0,3% higher education

The situation of Roma families

SERBIA	Majority	Roma
Households in severe poverty – less than 8,883 dinars per month (Cc. 70 e)	6.1%	**60.1%**
Children in extreme poverty	5.6%	**57.8%**
Not in formal employment	19%	**70-80%**
Housing / slums		**45%**

Roma pupils' education

- **Low educational achievements** (*National testing of third grade pupils in primary schools*, 2006)

- **Dicrimination** (*Ombudsman's Special Report about Discrimination of Children, Republic of Serbia*, 2013)

- **Segregation**
  90% of the pupils in schools for adult education
  32% of the pupils in special schools
  39% of the pupils in special classes (Fund for Open Society, 2010)

- **Drop out**
  45% of Roma pupils left primary education in period 2002/03-2007/08 (Baucal & Stojanović, 2011)

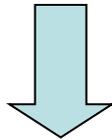# Teachers' beliefs: who is responsible for Roma pupils' underachievement?

- Roma parents: lack of motivation for education
- Roma pupils: lack of motivation for learning
- Roma culture: disvalue education
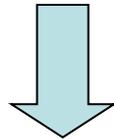
- **Attributing responsability for the underchievement to others** (Macura-Milovanović, 2011)

Teachers' practice in multicultural classes

- **lower expectations** of Roma pupils
- **lack of support** for learning and **lack of individualisation** of instruction
- **abridged curriculum**, passing from grade to grade without basic literacy

- lower achievement levels, high primary school drop-out rates (Open Society Institute 2007)

teachers lack the necessary competencies to manage multicultural classes

Student teachers' beliefs – who is responsible for Roma pupils' underachievement?

- The majority of ST attribute Roma pupils' learning underachievement to Roma parents' disinterest in schooling, Roma pupils' lack of motivation, and non-acceptance by peers (Macura-Milovanović and Peček, 2012)

- Most STs are in favour of schooling Roma pupils in regular schools; however, only half of them would accept them in their own classes (Peček, Macura-Milovanović & Vujisić-Živković, 2014)

- Most STs are aware of the discrimination against Roma pupils in schools; however, only third of them would make home visit to Roma family (Peček, Macura-Milovanović & Vujisić-Živković, 2014)

Teacher educators/institutions - present situation

- Out of five teacher education institutions in Serbia, four institutions lack courses/contents on Intercultural and/or Multicultural education in the curriculum

  Major challanges

- To prepare ST to accept responsibility for improving the education of all pupils (Florian, 2009)

- To overcome fragmentation between real life school problems and teacher education curricula

- To develop positive attitudes towards Roma national minority and culturally sensitive teaching

What can teacher educators do?

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Theoretical concepts of Inclusive education and Intercultural education (Inclusive education, Intercultural education, Inclusive education theory and practice, Team work in inclusive education, Individualization in inclusive education)

Most powerful tool: **ST's practical activities**
1. community based field experience
2. experiential learning (case study)

Field experience

- Practical task / conducting during student practice in elementary schools

- Engaging of STs in closer interaction with Roma families: home visits and interviews of Roma parents/families

- Making a closer look at the families and children that they are not familiar with

- Changing STs' beliefs and attitudes towards Roma children and parents

1. Field experience

1. Preparation of STs for field work:

- Photo and video materials presenting Roma culture, child raising and family education, housing in Roma settlements / slums.
- Conducting an interview on sensitive issues
- Issues about children: how do they play, how do they interact with each other and family members, what language do they speak, what are their preschool knowledge and experiences, how do they participate in family economy, etc.

Field experience

2. Selecting the Roma family in cooperation with school teacher

3. Conducting home visit and interview

4. Written report: transcripts of interviews, reflections and conclusions

5. Feedback from teacher educator and follow up discussions: focusing on intercultural awareness and tacit beliefs, hidden prejudices

2. Experiential learning (case study)

1. Intercultural education in theory (Haapanen, Bennett, Banks)
2. Intercultural education in practice: teachers' experiences in working with Roma children - horizontal learning

⟹ awareness, sensitivity ⟹ visibility

3. Practical activity: voluntarily teaching street Roma children
4. Reflections, supervision meetings and discussions
5. Application of knowledge and experience through peer education and voluntary work with children with special needs in regular primary school.

How can we prepare ST for working in multicultral settings?

STs learning is sound, meaningful and effective when:

- it includes ST's **initiative**
- STs are **solving practical and relevant real life problems** (education of street children)
- STs are using their personal and professional **competencies**
- STs control the realisation of the task, participation in defining aims of one's own learning.

Outcomes: developing STs' intercultural competencies

- Positive attitudes

- Awareness of cultural differences and respect for cultural differences

- Understanding of barriers to education

- Understanding of the power of teacher profession for social inclusion of marginalized groups

- Mutual acceptance, respect and friendship - no boundaries between "us" and "them"

Thank you for your attention!

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