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*The Hidden Curriculum in the Function
of Promoting Equal Educational
Opportunities for the Roma*

ABSTRACT : Hidden curriculum implies teaching attitudes, beliefs, values and assumptions which are often expressed in the form of rules, rituals and regulations. Therefore, it has a direct impact on communication, *ethos*, overall atmosphere and school culture. The hidden curriculum, unlike the so-called didactic curriculum, is a set of students' experiences that belong to the "unwritten curriculum," and is characterized by informality and lack of conscious planning. Its effects depend on the values and attitudes of individuals, but also on the dominant value system of the society in which the school is set. The hidden influences in the school curriculum are important prerequisites for creative and critical behavior, interaction and communication, teaching methods and strategies of the teachers who, in partnership with students, are free to co-create the educational process.

The integration of the Roma children in the educational system of the Republic of Croatia as well as the strengthening of the multicultural competence of teachers, will contribute to the promotion of their equal abilities and educational opportunities. By enabling positive conditions in the open school curriculum in daily practice, humanistic principles, pluralism and democratic values will be respected, and a positive hidden curriculum will also create a stimulating school culture. Strengthened multicultural competences of teachers can create a multicultural community through educating for social justice, preventing exclusion and marginalization, and by accepting cultural differences whose principles and values are the foundation of the National Curriculum of the Republic of Croatia.

KEY WORDS : children's rights, culture, hidden curriculum, Roma, teachers

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Environmental culture for the development of a positive identity

Hidden curriculum is reflected in school culture and school culture is reflected in the hidden curriculum. School culture is also reflected in the characteristics and behavior of teachers towards students and one another as well as towards the parents and the local community, the values, attitudes and stereotypes they promote and finally the hierarchy they develop. The existence of hidden (intentional or unintentional) goals of education reduces the transparency of the entire educational system, making it difficult to identify the real objectives of the system as well as management and control over it (Jukić, 2013).

Rilley (2003) connected the concepts of culture and hidden curriculum, explaining that the hidden curriculum subtly and non-intentionally, but strongly influenced what children would learn and do, which stemmed from their assessment of what form of behavior could achieve the approval of adults, and desirable or appropriate forms of behavior actually coincided with the concept of school ethos. Cohen, Manion and Morrisson (1996) and Ross et al. (1993, according to Walker, 1996) considered hidden curriculum to be the rules and routines of the school, which some researchers largely intertwined with its culture (Stoll, 1999; Prosser, 1999). Brown (2001) believed that hidden curriculum was reflected in the more informal forms of influence on the students' behavior and attitudes, while Pastuović (1999) believed it to be the hidden goals of education and the means to achieve them. Moreno (2007) believed that the culture of an institution was made from the norms and expectations of teachers, rights and obligations, roles and relationships of its members, which were reflected in all formal and informal interactions between adults and children, making up a sort of social framework of the curriculum. The employees of each institution defined culture as a lifestyle determined by common rituals, routines, standards, etc. (Kantor, Schulz & Fernie, 2007). Most interpretations of culture referred to specific values, beliefs and expectations of people in the institution, their usual behavior, i.e. rituals, ways of understanding and interpreting everyday events, which largely shaped the authenticity and identity of the educational institution (Stoll & Fink, 2000). Schein (ibidem) argued that culture is a deeper level of basic settings and beliefs that members of an organization share, which unconsciously determines the position of the organization in relation to itself and its environment, while Leithwood (2002) described culture as

a system of common, accepted meanings and symbols referring to the implicit and explicit content that made up the norms, beliefs, values and expectations, which were intentionally or unintentionally received and exchanged between members. Therefore, culture, according to Bruner (2000), provided a model of identity and actions for its members (Slunjski, 2006).

Educational efforts are aimed at building a man with harmoniously connected physical abilities and health, spiritual wealth, intellectual ability and truthfulness, moral strength and goodness, aesthetic sense, the culture of work, efficiency and creativity. Educational art is built on an idea of connecting teachers' experience with the students' experience. It also entails teachers accepting differences in students' experience as a necessary requirement and a requirement to establish interaction and finally of being respectful towards the students' experience (Bašić, 2009). The main purpose of education is to build a personality marked by genuine humanism and a sense of values. The complexity of the teaching profession is constantly increasing due to the rapid expansion of new scientific knowledge, global mobility, the development of techniques and technologies, new social relations and organization of life and work (Đuranović, 2005). Therefore, it is even more important to have pedagogically competent teachers who can meet the demands of contemporary society. The areas of teachers' pedagogical competences are mutually intertwined and there is no individualism. For teachers to be pedagogically competent, they need to possess knowledge, skills and abilities from pedagogical, psychological, methodological, and didactic areas.

The components of the pedagogical competence of teachers:

1. experience of competence in working with students, parents and teaching performance;
2. sense of security in the teacher's performance;
3. willingness to create conditions suitable for successfully meeting the needs of students;
4. being sure of the selection of appropriate procedures towards students, which results in a feeling of satisfaction of the teacher's calling (Ljubetić & Kostović Vranješ, 2008).

In contrast, the core components of pedagogical incompetence of teachers are: uncertainty in dealing with disciplinary problems and doubts about the choice of educational procedures, lack of quality relationships with students

resulting in a sense of burden from working with pupils (Ljubetić & Kostović Vranješ, 2008).

ISSA's definition of quality pedagogy that leads to a pedagogically competent teacher includes seven areas: interaction, family and community; inclusion, diversity and democratic values; assessment and planning; teaching strategies; environment for learning and professional development. Those areas are selected by the *International Step by Step Association (ISSA)* (2011) as they are areas in which it is necessary to provide high quality work in order to support children's development and learning. Those seven areas promote practices based on humanistic and socio-constructivist principles, developmentally-appropriate practices, individualized approach. They also promote the knowledge that learning takes place through interaction and dialogue between children and adults, as between children themselves, in a spirit of respect, encouragement and the autonomy of the one who teaches. Its starting point is the belief that the child is an able and complete being, although it requires some help and support from adults. ISSA's definition of quality pedagogy recognizes and promotes the important role of educational workers as pedagogically competent professionals who lead and guide children as they learn and explore. In particular, it highlights the importance of partnership with the family – the first educators, and also with the community – a natural environment for learning and research (ISSA, 2011). The indicators of school quality that required pedagogical competence of teachers and affected the quality of the educational process can be divided into several basic development areas: curriculum, achievement, teaching and learning, support for pupils, school culture and classroom culture as well as the cooperation of teachers with the director, professional development service and the local community (Jurić, 2007).

The importance of education of Roma minority

Today, in the European context, there is an increase in trying to train future teachers to promote the idea of mutual understanding and respect for different cultural communities. The process of social transformation is closely connected with the system of education which is directed towards the future, towards a knowledgeable society. Education holds huge potential for every nation. It has

become the primary factor of excellence, innovation, solidarity, responsibility and social cohesion in the context of long-term development of the European Community. The attitude towards the Roma and their communities in Europe has been imbued with many prejudices. The xenophobic attitude towards the Roma as well as their segregation are certainly important obstacles to their integration into mainstream society (Šlezak, Salaj, 2012). The authors see the overcoming of segregation in bringing the Roma closer to the majority population, as opposed to the marginalization of life on the edges of towns and villages. Yet the solution is not only found in the physical sense, but also in social relations, especially in improving the Roma's social, economic and educational status. The Roma population in Croatia is a recognizable part of multi-cultural environments, and today, they are certainly not integrated into all segments of society. A low level of education is one of the most important causes of the disadvantaged position of the Roma in the Republic of Croatia and the primary reason for their social exclusion. The promotion of cultural sensitivity in education in Croatian schools is evident in the cross-cultural amenities, and is certainly hidden in the values of education, in social interactions in the culture of the school and the (lack of) awareness of every individual of their competencies, cultural background and identity towards reducing ethnocentrism, prejudice, stereotypes, inequality and discrimination. With an increasing awareness of the national, religious, linguistic and cultural identity of an individual, we learn to respect differences. Solving problems in the education of Roma children is closely connected with the correct attitudes of teachers to the inclusion of these highly specific and sensitive groups in their societal upbringing – the education system.

The specific problems that have been accompanying the education of Roma children and future changes in the education system should have implications for adapting to the increased diversity of students. They should be reflected in the adaptation of teacher education curriculum to encourage the development of social, communication, multicultural and civic competences of future teachers. This will ensure their timely and adequate preparation to work in heterogeneous, inclusive classes. The context of educational achievements of Roma students points to the necessity of providing additional educational support at school to all children who experience difficulties in learning and social participation. The Roma population is the largest social and ethnic group that is insufficiently

present in the process of education. There are few Roma students enrolled in school and thus, a low rate of Roma graduation. Moreover, a large number of Roma students repeat grades, and then drop out in high school. Because of the lack of preparation for school and poorer achievements, Roma students are often separated into special classes, thus being stigmatized and demonstrating behavioral problems and diminished success. There is a significantly lower educational structure of the Roma population, even less than the average of all minorities in Croatia. Consequently, the low level of education contributes to a slower socialization and integration of the Roma, low employment, low living standards, stabilized nomadic traditions, discrimination, and generational poverty of the Roma. In general, a small percentage of educated Roma leads to their lower representation in social associations, politics, community and society. This low percentage also contributes to a more difficult financial situation and a lower quality of all aspects of life, such as home care, education and support for children or the provision of rights. Exclusion from education denies Roma children one of the basic human rights – the right to education¹, which prevents their full development and the development of all specific resources/talents. The consequences of the Roma's exclusion from education are reflected in the reproduction of poverty and lack of any prospects for a better future on the social plane.

The results of a comparative study *The Education of Roma children in Europe* showed that in France 95% of the interviewed teachers considered that their Roma pupils had insufficient achievements. In Spain, teachers assessed the academic achievements of their Roma students with an average score of 4.3 (on a scale of 10), while the average score for non-Roma pupils was 6.9. The relationship between academic achievement and student's age was inversely proportional: the older the student, the more exaggerated the failure (OPRE ROMA, 2002: 73). The argument also lay in the results of Roma and non-Roma students in the National

¹ The project *The Education of Gypsy childhood in Europe* (OPRE ROMA) is a sociological and ethnographic study of the education of Roma children in Italy, France and Spain. Equal Access to a Quality Education for Roma is the EUMAP report (Monitoring and Advocacy Program of the European Union, the Open Society Institute), which, among other things, contains data on key education indicators of the Roma population. The report aims to support the objectives of the "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015" in the framework of education and establish a framework for regular monitoring in all aspects of the Decade.

testing, in comparison with their school grades. If teachers had the same expectations for Roma and non-Roma students and evaluated them on the basis of the same criteria, Roma and non-Roma pupils with the same grade should have the same average scores on a standardized test. However, Roma children scored lower on tests than non-Roma students with the same grade, thus, it can be concluded that Roma students were expected to show less knowledge to get the same grade. The hidden curriculum was transparent so far as the different attitudes of teachers towards Roma students compared to non-Roma students. This is also true of different levels of expectation and assessment of student achievement, and consequently, lower expectations from students which contribute to their achieving lower or worse results. Thus, Roma students received less support, motivation and encouragement from their teachers, and therefore achieved less themselves.

Studies on the education of the Roma in Croatia showed that this group's problems in the area of education lay in poor economic conditions, poor adaptation to a different language, poor parental support, discrimination by society and the short duration of their education (Hrvatić, 2009; Bedeković, 2007; Piršl, 2007; Sablić, 2014; Mlinarević & Brust Nemet, 2015). The Croatian Government adopted the National Program for the Roma in 2003, and the Action Plan for the Decade of the Roma from 2005 until 2015, in 2005. The National Program and Action Plan related to education and to the integration of Roma children in the educational and wider social system, and it included educators and the means of monitoring the process, targets and measures for achieving them, indicators to monitor the implementation of measures, as well as the necessary resources. The current system of education in the Republic of Croatia provides equal opportunities to all children, but it is not flexible to the specific needs of Roma pupils. The initial results bound both institutions and the Roma community so that the Croatian Roma could preserve their ethnic identity and achieve minority rights, but also cease to live in ghettos, marginal settlements, as unemployed and on social welfare. Hrvatić (2009) emphasized that the problems occurred in inadequately adapted classes for Roma children, exam adjustments and their intelligibility, but were also caused by a lack of competent teachers trained to work with Roma children. A multicultural community implies a coexistence of different cultures based on the principles of multicultural respect, solidarity, responsibility, cooperation, participation, etc. (Sablić, 2014). The success of Roma pupils requires the cooperation of teachers, school counselors, principals, students, parents, prominent

representatives of minority communities, non-governmental organizations, local communities and others. All of these actors are required in the creation and development of open multicultural curriculum that contributes to the affirmation of school as a social community within a multi-cultural environment. By integrating different cultures, beliefs, habits and orientations, we can diminish the fear of the unknown and different, and replace it with understanding and acceptance. In this event Roma pupils would, via receiving the message of acceptance by teachers and peers, develop understanding, respect and acceptance of others in a positive hidden curriculum, school/class. Mesić (2008) assumed that students should not move away from their own culture and origin, but that teachers should prepare them and raise awareness of sharing their lives with people from other cultures, people who have different characteristics and whose ways of life are often different from theirs. Multicultural community offers numerous opportunities for the expansion of one's point of view, with the emphasis on strengthening coexistence, tolerance and equality of all educational stakeholders (Mlinarević & Brust Nemet, 2015). The scientific monograph *The challenges of education in multicultural environments* introduced "structured recommendations for teachers and students of teacher education faculties, suggesting that teachers and students, in order to gain successful implementation of multicultural competences in the educational system should be: open to the needs of the people around them; strive to a deeper understanding of themselves and others; lead by example and encourage others to promote the formation of attitude of openness, active listening and solidarity with others; endeavor to respect and promote the harmony of diversity; take responsibility for their relationship with other people; continuously learn and work on themselves to persevere in raising awareness and eliminating their own prejudices and all states to accept as a right, not a duty" (Baking & Mlinarević, 2009: 236).

Providing equal educational and training opportunities for the Roma through projects in Croatia

The development of multicultural competencies is a sensitive and life-long process. Schools and faculties that educate future teachers and educators – the main promoters, drivers and mediators in the acquisition of multicultural contents and values – play an important role in this process. Hrvatić (2009) mentions

the need for appropriate curriculum and projects to establish a quality system of education for the Roma in the educational system of the Republic of Croatia. To educate children means to educate society, react to any form of disregard, so that every child can have equal opportunities for development, learning and believing that they are just as valid as any other child. Given the fact that Roma children and children of low-income status rarely attend regular kindergarten or preschool program, they often lack mathematical and reading skills, as well as knowledge of Croatian language, all of them being key prerequisites to succeed at school from the earliest days. With the lack of success, those children often fall behind others, lose interest and develop a negative attitude towards school. There are three protective factors that affect educational achievement of children needing to be improved and nurtured: cooperation between parents and schools, a supportive environment and support from the community.

Within the various implemented projects, such as *Improvement of the situation of Roma children in the educational system in Baranja* (2013–2015), *Nonviolence begins with me* (2014), and *Support Network for Roma children – REYN* (Step by Step, 2014–2016), the goal was to raise the quality and efficiency of the education of Roma minority children and to ensure the acquisition of knowledge and skills that enable the personal development of students. In addition to professional training, exchange of experience, and information for the staff of kindergartens and primary schools, the aim of the network REYN, was to advocate for the improvement of Roma children's situation in the society. In addition, one of the important tasks of children was to finish elementary education, in order to continue their education and to reduce the differences between their educational achievements in relation to the average level of educational attainment of all students in elementary education.

After the projects *Education, empowerment and networking of youth through training in mediation and conflict resolution* (2006–2007), *Education, empowerment and networking of young Roma and non-Roma* (2007), *Empowering young people from marginalized groups for self-representation and active participation in the community* (2008–2009), *Ensuring the sustainability of the activities that are carried out in the community by young people from marginalized groups* (2009–2010), *Together against discrimination against Roma* (2010–2011), and *Employment through measures of public work* (2008 – present), the number of young and adult members (especially women) of Roma national minority was

increased through programs in primary and secondary education as well as vocational training aimed to strengthen their knowledge, competencies and skills for participation and competitiveness in the labor market as well as active participation in society and social processes. There has been an increase in the number of Roma adults who, under the influence of the above-mentioned projects, finished their primary, secondary and vocational education through adult education in accordance with the requirements of the labor market, and are employed in public affairs cleaning and arranging Roma settlements. Through the projects, measures aimed at encouraging individuals older than fifteen who have not finished primary and/or secondary education, were implemented to encourage them to continue their education and to support those affected by the programs and their families during the process of education and socioeconomic inclusion. Through the above-mentioned projects, the role of the Council of the Roma national minority and non-governmental sector is actively involved in informing and raising the awareness of the Roma community as to the importance of continuing education (Brust Nemet & Kostić, 2015).

All of the above helps the Roma community with integration and improved performance in education, housing, and health care, but it is necessary to ensure continuity, enthusiasm, resources, and desire for change even after the completion of the project. The Republic of Croatia and the institutions responsible for the implementation of these projects should find quality and long-term solutions for other inter-related and pressing problems of the largest and most vulnerable minority in Europe: issues of their employment, education, health and housing (Brust Nemet & Kostić, 2015).

A pilot project for Roma education realized within the framework of the plan The Decade for Roma Education from 2005 to 2015 was implemented in the elementary school “Dr. Franjo Tuđman”. The aim of the project was to equalize educational opportunities for Roma children, and to obtain better socialization and integration of Roma children in the school system. The project included 50 pupils aged 7 to 11 and 45 pupils aged 11 to 14. The project was implemented in the form of an extended stay for Roma children and children from socially disadvantaged families for lower grades, as well as instructive classes in Croatian, English, German, chemistry and mathematics. The students were provided with hot meals, trips, and gifts for the holidays. The project enabled education for teachers, and also education for the parents of Roma children through parent

meetings. Following the completion of the project, there were visible results in improved student success, communication, integration, and better attendance in regular classes. Roma children can successfully finish their education if they are motivated to actively participate in educational activities, provided with conditions for good socialization and integration, provided with assistance in learning, and encouraged to complete their education up to the highest degree their capabilities will allow (Lesić, 2015).

The Faculty of Education in Osijek designed and realized the project with the help of the European Union, alongside the NGO “Luna” from Beli Manastir as a partner. The project was named “Improving the situation of Roma children in education in Baranja (RO-ufos-luna-MI²)” and it was implemented to contribute to raising awareness of the importance of creating a climate of multicultural education and social justice in the community. Project members included: the Agency for Education – Osijek, Elementary School “Dr. Franjo Tuđman”, Beli Manastir and kindergarten “Cvrčak”, Beli Manastir. The overall aim of the project was to promote equal opportunities and integration of Roma children into the education system of the Republic of Croatia. The project contributed to the realization of that aim through the integration of Roma children into shorter educational programs and activities and through building the competencies of educators, teachers, headmasters, expert associates and students of the Faculty of Education for work in a multicultural community. In the long term, the project should improve the primary education of Roma children, in particular by emphasizing the importance of their socialization and integration in early childhood. Project activities aimed at the inclusion of Roma children in non-formal educational activities that helped in their socialization and in the acquisition of language competences.

The following main project activities have been realized:

- Establishing and realizing cooperation with the parents of Roma and socially deprived children and building of their capacities;
- Implementation of workshops for Roma children and children of other nationalities aged 3–6;

² Hereinafter, the project *Improving the situation of Roma children in education in Baranja* will be specified with the abbreviation RO-ufos-luna-MI.

- Implementation of out-of-school activities for Roma children and children of other nationalities;
- Assisting children in writing homework and mastering curriculum;
- Implementation of workshops about dialogue, non-violent communication and creative conflict resolution at primary school;
- Organization of a round table and an international conferences regarding the education of the Roma;
- Setting up and running of info-corners at the school and kindergarten;
- Training teachers, expert associates and students of the Faculty of Education about Roma culture and the challenges of working in a multicultural community;
- Conducting research about attitudes and competences of educators, teachers and parents.

The project involved all stakeholders in the education process: children, parents, teachers, expert associates, expert agencies and institutions. This was especially important for the education of disadvantaged groups in multicultural communities, and the establishment and effectiveness of this partnership was the token of the project success. Therefore, all project activities were designed in a way that established and nurtured cooperative relations. After the project implementation, an international and scientific conference “The Position of Roma in Education” was held, where the results of the project were presented. The conference offered an opportunity to acquire new competences, exchange experiences and establish partnerships in order to ensure sustainability and multicultural atmosphere (Mlinarević, Brust Nemet & Bushati, 2015).

In Croatia, according to the census of 2011, 16,975 Roma were registered. However, a realistic assessment, according to the number of inhabitants in Roma settlements, statistics of Roma associations and social welfare centers estimated between 35,000 to 40,000 Roma in Croatia. This figure has been used by the Government, non-governmental organizations, as well as representatives of the international community. This information suggests that the Roma accounted for less than 1% of the Croatian population and, therefore, the number of Roma children aged 7 was about 450. In Baranja (eastern Croatia) there were about 2,600 members of Roma community (the number could be smaller due to migration, especially in Baranja). In the early pre-school education before the implementation of the project RO-ufos-luna-MI, not a single Roma child from Beli

Manastir was involved. During the project, 26 Roma children became involved in early and pre-school education. Elementary school Franjo Tuđman from Beli Manastir currently educates 64 Roma students. Frequent non-attendance, problems with socialization, a high dropout rate, and consequently poorer educational achievement were common among Roma students. The professional development of teachers and Roma assistants to overcome those issues is still at an early stage. In order to improve the basic education of Roma children within the project RO-ufos-luna-MI, the emphasis was on the socialization and integration of Roma children and their parents in the community. This was with the intention of creating a culture environment that promoted the development of positive identity, especially in kindergarten and elementary schools. Project activities encouraged the inclusion of Roma children in non-formal educational and training activities that aid their socialization and the acquisition of language skills. Project activities were designed to establish and nurture collaborative relationships, and to help Roma children with socialization and preparation for school. This was with the aim of ensuring they had a better start in primary education, as an integrated pre-school education of Roma children ensured better performance in school in addition to providing better linguistic preparation for school. Project realization improved the basic education of Roma, promoted their cultural identity, enabled lifelong education of teachers, and strengthened the competencies of students for future professional work through experiential learning.

Teachers' multicultural competencies

The development of multicultural competence is a sensitive and life-long process. Preparing people for coexistence in a multicultural environment is a pedagogical task. This guidance should start as early as kindergarten and elementary school with the process of socialization and education, and should be continued throughout life-long education. Schools and teacher education universities have an important role in this process as they educate future teachers – the main mediators in the acquisition of multicultural content and value (Mlinarević & Brust Nemet, 2010).

RO-ufos-luna-Mi project activities confirmed the level of teachers' multicultural competencies and strengthened them. Based on the evaluation of six educational

workshops, two seminars, and on a self-assessment scale of multicultural competence completed by teachers after participating in workshops and seminars, one can conclude that professional training contributed to the development of teachers' competence and more successful educational work with Roma students. The topics of the educational workshops were as follows: working with students with behavioral problems, working with students with learning difficulties, creative problem solving, conflict resolution strategies, nonviolent communication, active listening, positive discipline, stress in teaching, communication with parents, and building self-esteem in children. The seminar topics were: Romani studies and multiculturalism in education. The leaders of educational workshops and the speakers at the seminars were education experts with years of experience in the field of Romani studies, multiculturalism in education, Croatian studies, rehabilitation, pedagogy and psychology. All workshops and seminars were successfully realized, as evidenced by the evaluations. Educational workshops were assessed with mean values above 4.00 (4.35), which included benefits from the workshop, satisfaction with the content, manner and methods of work, the conduct of the workshops, one's own involvement in the activities, the contribution of the workshop to increasing competence for working with Roma children and the contribution of the workshop in fulfilling the specific objectives of each educational workshop. The fulfillment of the specific objectives of each workshop was reflected in the responses of participants who pointed out that the workshops contributed to the teacher's understanding of basic factors, causes, needs and motives underlying the behavior of Roma children and in developing the ability to use the newly acquired competences in the classroom. Following active participation in all educational workshops, the teachers were given all necessary materials, so that they themselves conducted workshops during school years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. These teacher-conducted workshops were completed with their own students in the "Dr. Franjo Tuđman" elementary school in Beli Manastir, a total of 168 educational workshops in all departments from 1st to 4th grade were held. Given the importance of dissemination, it is important to point out that the implementation of educational workshops in classrooms is ongoing and in this paper we cannot present exhaustive results of the evaluations (Mlinarević & Brust Nemet, 2015).

The teachers also expressed high satisfaction with various aspects of the seminar, as all mean values were above 4.00 (4.40). The participants were most satisfied with the conduct of the seminar and believe that the seminar was

informative and useful. They were also satisfied with the manner and methods of work. When asked: “What new information did you learn and/or find out at the seminar?” the participants provided the following answers: information and knowledge regarding the importance and opportunities for active involvement of citizens in solving numerous problems in the community through civic initiatives and associations; useful information that encouraged them to engage in some form of volunteering; specific ways of solving problems and raising awareness about the problem and the position of the Roma in education; information about the history of the Roma and their suffering throughout history, about Romani culture, tradition and customs; the importance of multicultural education; and benefits of this kind of awareness seminar for all individuals, especially educators. When asked “Do you have any suggestions regarding the content and conduct of the seminar?”, the participants commented that more seminars of this kind were needed as well as more activities on the part of participants themselves, concrete examples and experiences of teachers working with Roma children and the experiences of members of Roma minority themselves.

The teachers assessed their multicultural competence as very high after participating in six educational workshops and two expert seminars, since the mean values of all items were at least 4.00. Likewise, the mean value of the total score was very close to the maximum theoretical value of 125. The teachers considered themselves to be multiculturally competent. The results of a similar survey (Jevtić & Mikanović, 2013) conducted in Serbia among 305 teachers in primary and secondary schools as well as students of teacher education studies in Serbia through the analysis of variance, showed a statistically significant difference in teachers’ desire to be trained in the field of multicultural education. Teachers with higher self-efficiency beliefs proved to be more committed to the development of a multicultural dialogue. This link was mild but statistically significant, as demonstrated by regression analysis. Factor analysis revealed teachers’ priorities when it came to multicultural education. The factorization of measuring variables suggested that teachers’ awareness of noble assumptions about multiculturalism should be strengthened (Mlinarević & Brust Nemet, 2015).

The teachers believed that Roma children had sufficient capacity to finish school via the regular curriculum (variability probably reflected the view that all children had the ability to complete the regular curriculum). They expressed

a conviction that Roma children needed help to master a subject, that they were not motivated and did not have good conditions to learn at home. The results were in accordance with the perception of obstacles to the integration of Roma children that were present with the Roma (Mlinarević, Kurtovic & Svalina, 2015).

84 students of the Faculty of Teacher Education, preschool teachers, and elementary school teachers in Baranja have acquired competences and skills for work with Roma children. The action increased competencies of 84 students (64 in the first and 84 in second seminar) of the Faculty of Teacher Education, preschool teachers and primary school teachers in several different ways. They have received expert training at the Faculty of Teacher Education, which prepared them for work with Roma children and parents, and also for work with Roma children with learning difficulties. Secondly, through participation in two seminars, they acquired knowledge in Romology and multiculturalism in education and upbringing, active listening, identities, prejudices and stereotypes as well as in basic values and principles of volunteer work. Thirdly, the international conference on the education of the Roma and its conclusion and findings (conference proceedings in Croatian and in English published in 300 copies) presented innovative teaching methods for teachers and experts working in multicultural communities. These will prove beneficial not only for the 50 conference participants, but also for all those who read the published conference proceedings.

Supporting Roma parents in developing educational possibilities for school-age children

For many Roma associations, the education of the Roma is a priority topic for improving the status of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe.

An example of good practice in Croatia was the inclusion of 332 parents of Roma students in Međimurje County from 2012 to 2014, in the project *Empowering Roma parents to support the development and education of their children*. Project activities significantly improved the quality and frequency of cooperation between parents and schools. School employees and parents become partners in creating change. In addition, there has been an improvement in educational

achievements of children and a reduction of inappropriate behavior. Joint participation in the project contributed to a greater understanding and respect between Roma and Croatian parents (Borko, Perhoč, & Brajkovic, 2015).

Throughout the RO-ufos-luna-MI project activities, a partnership of school and Roma parents was developed, in Baranja, Croatia. Roma parents were empowered and became partners in the process of their children's socialization, integration and achievement. Collaboration with Roma parents was one of the most important pillars of the action. They received training designed to fit their needs as parents and as members of the community. Also, they supported their children in attending pre-school, primary school, out-of-school activities and workshops. Research results (Brust Nemet & Kostić, 2015) on the attitudes of parents to the education of Roma children (N=40) indicated that 37 out of 40 parents thought that school was very beneficial and important for children, however, 19,4% held that not all subjects were equally important (e.g. math vs. Sunday school). Furthermore, 94.4% of parents felt that school contributed to education, while 5.6% were not sure or thought that the school contributed more to education than upbringing. Most of the parents stated that their biggest concern was for their child to get a good education in order to find a job. Health was also very important, and many parents worried about properly educating their children and providing them with education and everything necessary to that end (Brust Nemet & Kostić, 2015).

The association of Roma Friendship Luna organized monthly visits with the parents during the RO-ufos-luna-MI project. This was so that parents and children could talk about the project and its activities, the enrolment of children in kindergarten and how to support their children in schooling. Also, they discussed current issues of the Roma community in Beli Manastir. Volunteers of the Association of Roma Friendship Luna have conducted 218 home visits. Prior to this, the protocol for active listening had been designed. However, since the majority of project activities relating to parents and their children have not yet started, the main topic of conversation was the problems that the Roma community encounters relating to living conditions, employment and education. After the education cycle for parents has been implemented, and their children have started taking part in educational activities, the volunteers conducted visits to parents' homes as planned. The majority of parents support their children in attending project activities and try to enhance their interest in schooling. They

are especially interested in the assistance sessions offered by the students of FTEO: the parents encourage their children to attend these sessions and receive assistance. The parents have been participating in all project activities designed for them and especially in coordination meetings, where they discuss their problems and enrolment in kindergarten. We are pleased that in this school year 2014/2015, 25 Roma children have been enrolled in “Cvrčak” kindergarten in Beli Manastir and its branch kindergartens in Šećerana and in Branjin Vrh. They are the first Roma children to regularly attend kindergarten in Beli Manastir. 53 Roma parents took part in these workshops.

Capacity building is a process which will continue, due to the poor education of parents. The results of active listening, which is to be conducted in the fifth quarter of project realization, will give us a thorough insight to what extent the parents feel their capacities have been raised. However, we observed a positive shift in some parents and we are trying to motivate them to finish primary school and to build their capacities in this way as well. Furthermore, after the workshops, the parents started to be more proactive about their children’s schooling. The majority of parents encouraged their children to regularly attend school, which will enable them to master school curriculum more easily and have better success in school. Also, in 2014, parents of 25 Roma children enrolled their children in kindergarten. The cooperation with Roma parents was good. One of the tasks was to inform parents of preschool and primary school children from the Roma population in association “Luna” about the forthcoming project and project activities (workshops, consulting, and activity inclusion, raising children). Promotional materials and invitations to cooperation and inclusion in project activities were distributed. There were a number of visits to Roma homes where help in problem solving and the education of children was given. A possibility of free education in primary school in Beli Manastir and vocational retraining was presented to parents. Moreover, the project team tried to make parents aware of the conditions and environment for successful learning and writing homework (didactic materials, desk, chair, notebooks).

The parents went on a study trip to Tuzla where they actively participated in the roundtable discussions. Also, they took part in organizing festivities (Roma holidays, birthdays, School day, etc.) and visited theatres and a Zoo with their children. The parents were motivated throughout the project to actively participate in different school activities and boards (school plays, school board).

Improved cooperation between Roma parents and schools was achieved. The parents regularly participated in individual conversations with teachers as well as teacher-parent meetings. They also expressed their satisfaction with the workshops, which the parents found to be both interesting and informative. Luna showed a responsible attitude towards the parents throughout the duration of the project and the parents were very understanding. The association has helped parents with providing space, technical assistance and a revival in promoting their own goals as well as the goals of the project in the community. The parents still lack information, knowledge and skills to investigate their own projects, but we are working with and preparing several parents from the group to write and implement smaller scale projects in their community.

Project activities of RO-ufos-luna-MI directly aimed at students' development

Within the project RO-ufos-luna-MI, all project activities had an indirect impact on students' development. Some of these activities stood out: workshops for children in kindergarten, help with studying and writing homework at school as well as extracurricular activities for all students who were keen to participate, Roma and non-Roma.

Workshops in a kindergarten

In order to socialize Roma children and give them the opportunity to build friendships and encourage them to learn the language, six workshops were held for 50 Roma children and children of other nationalities. This had an impact on children's positive self-image and on the complete development of every individual child. Participants also developed a positive image of preschool as a place for playing, learning, for being creative and for building friendships. Their parents were also enlightened as to the advantages of their children's socialization and integration into broader community at the first level of the educational system in the Republic of Croatia. We are satisfied with the children's feedback and we are happy that our work with the Roma population

throughout this project resulted in 25 Roma parents enrolling their children in kindergarten.

Help with studying and writing homework

University students helped Roma children with studying and writing homework. They went to “Dr. Franjo Tuđman” primary school every day for 2 hours and worked not only with Roma children, but with all children in need. The students who participated in project activities improved the grades and socialization of Roma children but there is no evidence whether these children would actually be able to attend regular classes. A longer period of time is needed for the professionals from the State office for administration to determine the abilities of each student.

Extracurricular activities

With the aim of facilitating the social integration of Roma pupils, 38 Roma children from Beli Manastir, aged 7-11, participated in four different out-of-school activities (Theatre group, Dance group, Sports group, and Little school of mathematics). This afforded these children the opportunity to socialize with children of other nationalities, to practice and strengthen their communication skills, to meet their needs and interests and to create a positive self-image.

70% of Roma children were educated according to special education programs. Many Roma children in Baranja have an insufficient command of the Croatian language. In addition, many of them are growing up in inadequate socio-economic conditions and their parents often lack motivation to invest in their children’s education (due to low educational levels and past experience with discrimination on the part of the parents). On the other hand, teachers and other school staff working with Roma children lack training, support and resources to deal with ethnically mixed classes. Teachers usually hold low expectations of their capabilities and motivation, which, in turn, influences teacher behavior and confirms the low expectation results. All of this results in poor attendance at school by Roma children, many of them attend special programs and drop out

at an early age, some of them are even violent. Ultimately there was a failure of cooperation among stakeholders of the educational process due to insufficient competences, skills and lack of sensitivity to the issues in question.

In order to improve this situation, teachers were trained on: how to help Roma students acquire language skills and master the curriculum; how to foster inclusion of Roma children; how to boost their self-respect, how to overcome difficult situations in classes and how to establish good relations with Roma parents and 24 teachers of primary school (1st to 4th grade) in Beli Manastir. Teachers also received materials for six workshops to be conducted in their classes throughout the school year (totaling 168 workshops held for app. 500 children).

In order to efficiently work on the socialization and the early education of Roma children, it was important to build strong relationships among all stakeholders of the educational process in a multicultural community. These include: parents, teachers, children, experts and the local community. Their cooperation was strengthened through three separate activities: 64 stakeholders took part in a roundtable discussion on Roma education; a Protocol for cooperation of all stakeholders of the educational process has been designed and established; and two creative info corners were set up and are still running in the school and kindergarten in Beli Manastir.

The project RO-ufos-luna-MI was successfully implemented, most of the activities were fully realized as planned, and the results for the majority of default parameters have been achieved.

Conclusion

The hidden curriculum of a school, i.e. school culture, could contribute to the development of Roma students' integration. We can derive positive developments by promoting the cultural identity of the Roma, becoming aware of the needs of vulnerable groups and by minimizing the marginalization and discriminatory practices against the Roma. Additionally, these positive developments can be achieved by facilitating frequent contact and cooperative relations between Roma and non-Roma parents and children and teachers in various activities in the school and community. It is important that the academic

community and civil society, as well as experts directly involved in the education of children, make and enact recommendations related to the education of children and their teachers with respect to the processes of integration and multiculturalism of the region in which we live. It is necessary to encourage a dialog among scientists about multicultural education, exchange experiences and present programs of multicultural school programs in Croatia, the region and the world. It is also essential to emphasize the importance of multicultural competence of future teachers, provide guidance for teachers with regard to the integration processes and multicultural community in which they work and find appropriate approaches to promote multicultural dialog.

Various efforts through projects of state institutions, educational institutions and civil society organizations in Croatia allowed equal opportunities for Roma children/students. Positive examples of project results showed that it was possible to strengthen the multicultural competence of teachers, to enlighten the importance of education among parents and create an enabling environment for the successful education of Roma students.

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