THE TRAINING OF INTERCULTURAL MEDIATORS- A DESIRABLE PROJECT IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Mihaela NEACŞU*

Abstract*: The common living on the same territory of many cultures, understood as open and permeable systems supposes their members coming closer by communication and intercultural relations, by abolishing prejudices and stereotypes, by mutual enrichment and spiritual growth. The present paper supposes to analyze recent preoccupation in forming intercultural mediators in our country. The article sets the practical consideration of intercultural mediation on the pedagogy of socio-cultural diversity with the aim to offer conceptual and procedural qualifications concerning the intercultural mediators' role, attributes, and competences. The aim and objectives of the present paper deals with probing , at the level of the academic community and local community the perceptions of some foreign students from the University of Pitesti, of some university teachers and some representatives of the ethnic and foreign community established in Arges concerning the necessity of forming a body of intercultural mediators, that should facilitate the intercultural dialogue and support the integration of foreign students, and general of migrators in our community. The implied methodology is of quality type. We used as research tools the analyses of documents and semi structural interview. The results of the research showed the need to form intercultural mediators on a local level and a possible project was generated in order to form them.*

Keywords: *intercultural, intercultural mediators, multicultural society.*

Introduction

In an important European communiqué one emphasizes that *"all over the world, the cultural diversity and the intercultural dialogue became major challenges for a global order based on peace, mutual understanding and respect for common values, as well as protecting and promoting human rights and conservation of languages."* (An European Agenda for a Culture in a World in Process of Globalization, 2007:3)

The theory of cultural diversity leads to the co-existence of more cultures, of multiple cultures, but does not exclude the thesis *of cultural clash* in the context of globalization. (Huntington, 1993). It is desirable that in multicultural societies people belonging to different socio-cultural, ethnic, religious, professional and age groups to live peacefully in a common space, without having conflicts. Plugaru L. (2007:8) considered that *"cultural pluralism sets the problem of communication among cultures that admit that each of them contribute mainly through its specific differences to enrich human experience."*

If one succeeds interaction and exchange between cultures, with the possibility to generate cultural expressions that are shared through dialogue and mutual respect, then we can talk of intercultural relations. These represent a dynamic process of exchanges and dialogue, of negotiation among groups and of identifying a common language and a common space in which the intercultural communication should take place. Rey M. (1999) explains the term "inter" through the processes of interaction, reciprocity, abolishing barriers, and solidarity among groups that are from different cultures. According to Drăgoi V. (2005), intercultural communication supposes obtaining some information from three levels: cultural, socio-cultural and psycho-

* University of Piteşti, mihaela_g_neacsu@yahoo.com

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cultural. In the context of globalization, intercultural communication is made also as an effect of population migration towards a job and a better living.

At European level politics, programs, directives and standards according migration in general have been adopted.

The community directives deal mainly the entrance and staying of different kinds of migrants (students, researchers, workers, asylum applicants, family members). In order to consolidate the economic, social and cultural benefits brought by the migration phenomenon in Europe, The European Commission adopted in 2011 "*The European Agenda or the integration of migrators from third country nations*", that emphasizes the importance of consolidation measures of the migrants democratic participation, facilitating their right to vote in local elections, the essential role of local authorities in the process of migrants integration, creating new local, regional and national counseling organisms, that will support the migrants' integration efforts and encourage their businesses and economic initiatives.

Unlike Romanian migration quantified to approximately 10 % from the population of Romania, the phenomenon of immigration in Romania has low levels (in 2010, 0.3 from the total population). Most foreigners with permanent staying in Romania come from Turkey, Moldavia Republic, China and Syria. In order to support the immigrants in Romania, in 2012 it was created the first *Center of Research and Documentation in the Field of Immigrants Integration*, and the Romanian Office for Immigration stipulated in the *Yearly Program* (2012:2-3) many information, counseling and sustaining actions of migrants in which "*…it will involve cultural mediators in order to facilitate the third country nationals access to services offered by public institutions…*".

Conceptual delimitations that lends color to the analyzed problem

In Romania the profession of mediator is new, being known mainly in the field of justice as *"a modality to solve conflicts amiably, with the help of a third person specialized as a mediator, in neutral, impartial and confidential conditions, and having the free consent of the parties"* (art.1/Law 192/2006 for the mediation and organization of the mediator profession). The Mediation Council coordinated the entire activity of mediators from justice.

The mediator's area of action and intervention differs from justice to health, from education to social field. Thus the exigencies in training mediators are different and are connected to the role, the responsibilities and the mission given to mediators for each separate field. In the field of justice, the professional training of mediators is made as a specialization just for the persons who graduated from university studies and who take part in courses acknowledged for this, according to present law.

In educational field operates the school mediator *"as agent of the community in relation to school, he represents community in school and school within community. The school mediator is part of school community, understands and speaks the community language, has graduated from highs cool-vocational specialty-school mediator profile- or graduated from an authorized course for the professional training as a school mediator."* (Occupational standard, 2008:3)

In health, the sanitary mediator is "*a person that mediates the relation between vulnerable persons and local sanitary authorities and social protection institutions. The health mediator contributes to inform the medical/sanitary stuff of the customs and traditions of minority groups in the respective community.* (Occupational standard, 2011:3)

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In the social problem that less favored persons, groups, communities confronts with, the social mediator is involved "*in order to improve their social situation and facilitate relations in the trio person-family-community"*. (Occupational standard, 2004:4)

Can the social mediator be assimilated to a cultural/intercultural mediator? The answer is to be found also in the Occupational standard in which it is specified that "*the mediator's activity is complex, taking into consideration that this can be a mediator between two cultures"*. (2004:4)

Cultural mediation "describes a profession that studies cultural differences between people, using data in solving problems. It is one of the main mechanisms of human development according to the psychological theory introduced by Lev Vygotsky" (Wikipedia). According to Halba B. (2011:10) intercultural mediation "is a process aiming at enhancing social integration, living together, meeting and gathering people with different backgrounds... Intercultural mediation is not a substitute but a support for migrants to reach autonomy".

The practice of intercultural mediation in European space (Italy, France, Spain, and Belgium) is developed, and there is a mediation market affirmed more than a decade ago. The intercultural mediator is that foreign citizen with a special training as mediator, who offers counseling and support to solve the foreigners' problems in order to make it easy for the communication between immigrants and the institutions of the host country. The intercultural mediators provides a close connection among the members of the migrants' community and public authorities, assists the members of the community in which other foreign citizens are part of and who ask for their support in the relation to local authorities, transmits interest information to community members, etc.

In Romania forming intercultural mediators is rather new, the Project "*Migrant in Intercultural Romania*" (2012-2015), initiated by the Intercultural Institute in Timisoara in partnership with the League for the Human Rights Defense in Cluj, The Center for Civic Resources Constanta and ADIS Association in Bucharest, has as its aim the creation of an intercultural environment adequate for the foreigners' integration in Romania. Within the project 22 intercultural mediators were trained, representatives of different communities of migrants from Bucharest, Cluj and Iasi and Timisoara in order to develop activities with and for these communities of migrants in these cities.

In Arges county, from the data offered by the Immigration Service we learn that there are 1650 foreigners, from which 80% live in Pitesti, 55% have ages between 30 and 60 years, 40 % came to study and have the ages between 18 and 30 years old, and 5% have ages over 60 years old and want to start a business. Arges County is on the 17th place at a national level according the number of foreigners in evidence.

Purpose of the Study

The quality study focused on the subjective dimension of individual perceptions of some foreign persons temporary/definitely established in Pitesti (4 students and 2 businessmen) according the difficulties met at their arrival in Romania, communication barriers and integration in community, the necessity of forming some intercultural mediators, hat should facilitate the intercultural dialogue and support the foreigners' integration in the local community.

Also some university teachers' perceptions have been taken into account (4) according the migrants' problems and a possible training program for intercultural mediators.

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The used **methodology** is of quality type: the analyzes of documents and the semi-structural interview, based on narrative theory (Polkinghorne, 1995). In order to devise some semi direct discussions, the interviewer disposed of a series of questions that served as a guide (annex) and which have not been asked in a certain order, but according the discussion flux and the interlocutor's reactions (Moscovici S., Buschini F., 2007). By using *The Backword Design Method* (Wiggins, McTighe, 1998) it was generated a possible intercultural mediators training program.

Results and Findings

The interviewed foreign students declared that they took the information they needed from the internet. An important role was held by relatives and friends that know or work in Romania. Thus they had the first contacts with "theirs" and had the feeling they are not alone. A respondent said he also got information from the foreign student's guide and proposed that within the university should exist a tutorial program for the foreign students in the first year of college: "*I offer myself volunteer as a mentor for my colleagues newly arrived at the university"*. (I. student). Another respondent underlined the advantages of living in a hostel with other students: "*it is very good to stay in the hostel because you learn the language better, you are obliged to speak Romanian and even more, you make Romanian friends. I have a lot of friends and I learned in the hostel to cook Romanian food*." (A., student). It was mentioned the fact that they received many information from friends who knew foreign students associations in the big university centers that deals with the information and guidance of those that have the same nationality.

One of the respondents that has a business in Pitesti declared that "*for a newly arrived foreigner it is very hard to find work and a place to live if nobody helps you… you can find the information you need faster only if you speak Romanian, otherwise it is more difficult… this is why it would be better to exist someone who can guide you and help you because problems will not fail to appear. I offer as volunteer to be a mediator for those like me because I know how hard it can be to manage on a foreign ground… maybe I should go to school or some courses in this sense…* (T., Syria). Another respondent said that :"*I made Romanian friends and since I have established myself here, I've seen that the main attitude of the Romanians towards us, those who came to make a business here, is mainly of indifference more than curiosity or worrying….*" (M., Italy).

It was underlined the fact that "*it would be important to exist a support person for foreigners, whom they should trust, that should offer information, whom to contact whenever one needs. And who should help overcoming some of he problems foreigners deal with…This is for me the intercultural mediator."*

According to another respondent the intercultural mediator has an important role in facilitating mutual knowledge because "*it is necessary to know each other well, our history, culture and civilization because we ll live as a family and we can tell what we have special and valuable, what are our traditions and beliefs in our people and traditions. I think this should do a cultural mediator."*

The interviews had a common factor: the need to inform the foreigners and their desire to be counseled by one of them. One of the most frequent obstacle for the migrants in Romania was that connected to the difficulty of learning Romanian language. The students told their experiences from the training year in Romanian language, and one of the respondents underlined the need of organizing courses for Romanian language and cultural orientation by the non-profit organization that are able

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to do this. It was said that this can be the place where the intercultural mediator can train and work.

The group analyzes with the interviewed teachers stressed different problems of the foreigners connected to social, working, medical assistance integration, as a consequence specific of the place, different from their national specific. The respondents sustained the need to obey Romanian laws and the existence of a communication network among foreigners, in which should take part Romanian community leaders, representatives of the employers, foreign volunteers. The discussions focused mainly on the possibility of forming some foreign persons as intercultural mediators. Using *the backward design method* it was generated a possible curriculum of training (table 1) after the steps have been covered: identifying the desired results, determine the evaluation test and planning instruction and learning experiences.

Table 1. The Intercultural Mediators' Training Program - proposal

Nr.crt.	Modules for the intercultural mediators' training program (proposal)
1.	Legislation according immigration, foreigners' rights and obligations
2.	Mediation process
3.	Preventing and solving a conflict
4.	Counselling and Support for social integration
5.	Mediation in educational contexts
6.	Family mediation
7.	Social and communitary mediation
8.	Juvenile mediation
9.	Intercultural and cultural diversity
10.	Cultural orientation and communitary communication
11.	Mediation practice

Offering and covering such a training program can be the responsibility of the University or some non-governmental organizations that will take this mission. Who will be the mediators and what competences they should have, which is the occupational profile of the intercultural mediator in Romanian society and where he should activate, these are just a few problems that remain open on the decision makers' agenda and those interested in this problem.

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Conclusions

The study had an exploratory role, allowed the individual and group reflection over some practices and experiences as a migrant, the analyzes of some needs and generated a possible curriculum for intercultural mediators' training.

Despite the presented difficulties and obstacles according the migrants' need for information, the general perception after the interviews was that only by using the intercultural dialogue one can lower the social distance between the migrants and the local community, one can change discriminatory attitudes and behaviors towards foreign persons that choose to work or study in Romania. The intercultural mediator has a key role in optimizing communication between cultures, people and civilizations, in expressing the migrants' problems and needs in relation to local authorities, in sustaining foreigners in clarifying and solving some problems, in organizing some socio-cultural events, in facilitating the knowledge of Romanian laws, of foreigners" rights and obligations in Romania.

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INTERVIEW GUIDE

For foreign students and foreign interviewed persons

1. How long have you been in Romania?
2. Why have you chosen to come to Romania?
3. What difficulties have you met when arriving to Romania?
4. Do you know what rights and obligations foreign citizens have in Romania?
5. According to you, what should a foreign citizen do in order to integrate in community?
6. Who offered, or can offer to you the information you need?
7. Would you like to be mediator for the foreign citizens in the county?
8. How could you obtain this?
9. What do you think you should know/learn in order to become an intercultural mediator?
10. What do you think you could do for the foreigners established in Arges?

For the interviewed teachers

1. Why do you think some foreign persons choose to live in Romania?
2. What difficulties do you think foreign citizens meet in Romania?
3. According to you what should a foreign citizen should do in order to integrate in the Romanian community?
4. Who offers foreign citizens the information they need?
5. Do you think there should be an intercultural mediator?
6. What could the intercultural mediator do for the foreigners in the community?
7. What should know/learn an intercultural mediator?

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