common cultural heritage of a multiethnic society: curricula for schools

February 2011
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# INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of curricula on Common Cultural Heritage</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals, attributes, skills, contents and methods</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and evaluation</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

In multiethnic and multicultural societies, education is one of the main issues under scrutiny and discussion.

The approach to education in such contexts is a crucial issue as education can work two ways:

- It can help children and youth, teachers and parents from different ethnic groups and cultures to understand each other, to improve inter-ethnic and multicultural dialogue, to learn to cooperate and work together, to realize that diversity is an asset for the community and not a problem, that it is possible to transform conflicts into opportunities for a better future,

  or

- It can contribute to making the ethnic and cultural gap grow bigger, keeping the past and ongoing conflicts alive, even planting the seed of future social unrest, tensions and violent conflicts.

The Nansen Dialogue Network (NDN) is firmly convinced of the positive role that education should play in actively and effectively supporting intercultural and interethnic dialogue processes at local, national and international levels. In other words: we firmly believe that working in the right direction with all the actors involved in the educational system of a community, or of a country (local and national politicians, teachers, parents and students) we can make a major contribution to conflict transformation and prevention, reconciliation and peace building.

Several Nansen Dialogue Centres have been working for many years (and they are still actively working) in this direction.

This first issue of the NDN Education & Dialogue Papers, based on our field experience in the Vukovar and Baranja region, Croatia, aims to illustrate how a new approach to the curriculum in schools can make a difference and contribute to fill the interethnic gap.

The joint effort of the Nansen Dialogue Centre in Osijek and a group of Croatian professionals from all ethnic groups made it possible to develop and implement a new curriculum in the schools of Vukovar and Baranja region, “Common Cultural Heritage of the Region”, which is still under implementation in eight local schools.

The following pages, addressed mainly to school directors, teachers and educators, try to illustrate the logic behind this new type of curriculum and, last but not least, to provide elements and inspiration for possible replication of similar approaches and initiatives elsewhere.

Nansen Dialogue Network Educational Team
February 2011
THE PURPOSE OF CURRICULA ON COMMON CULTURAL HERITAGE

Unlike the majority of national and minority curricula, where each ethnic community is mainly occupied with its own cultural attributes, NDN supports the development of curricula based upon the mutual study of the cultural and spiritual heritage of all people, ethnicities and minorities existing in a community or given territory.

Thus, as in the case of the Vukovar and Baranja region experience supported by the Nansen Dialogue Centre in Osijek, Croatia, a curriculum on Common Cultural Heritage should be conceived as a dialogue and cooperation-based subject, within which the students and teachers of different ethnic groups (and cultural and religious backgrounds) would study the common cultural heritage together, using the modern methods of learning.

Experiences so far have shown that the interethnic communication is generally undermined in the educational systems. Therefore, the fact that each ethnic/religious group turns only to its own heritage makes this situation even worse.

Our experience in Vukovar and Baranja region shows that the development and implementation of this new type of curriculum in the schools leads to improved communication and understanding among different ethnicities.

By teaching children from an early age to respect other communities in the region, we also teach them how to live in harmony with those communities in the future.

In other words, when children and teens study together, they also learn how to live together with a deeper sense of mutual respect and understanding.

Furthermore, through thorough mutual (intercultural) observation of the multiculturalism in the community or given territory, not only does a possibility of creating new relations among different (and divided) ethnic groups within the community arise, but also development of universal human values is encouraged.

Therefore, the purpose of such an approach to the common heritage of a society or community is to create a mature, responsible and complete individual, positively oriented towards the society and the culture that surrounds him/her. It will also raise awareness of the needs and the specificities of the community or territory and will help its social and economic development.

In the case of Vukovar and Baranja region the new curriculum on Common Cultural Heritage was built around what we consider universal values and which are, in the specific case of Croatia, also listed in the general recommendations of the Croatian National Educational Standard.

Above all, those values are:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➔ Dignity and freedom of any individual person;</td>
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<td>➔ Respect for human rights and commitment to inherent duties</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Respect for others</td>
</tr>
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<td>➔ Democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Peace and rejection of violence as a goal and as an instrument,</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Inclusiveness, social inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Solidarity</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➔ Sustainable development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➔ Equal opportunities for everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➔ Protection and respect for the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➔ Personal and social responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Besides the universal values listed above, the values present in a given community are the key
starting point in the creation of a curriculum of this type.

The “local” values present in a given community reflect the attitude of a person towards him/her
self, towards other people; towards work, society, religion, culture and nature.

And in a multicultural, multiethnic community or territory, the latter provides us with a whole range
of different contents and approaches to explore.

Many of these so-called local values are mutual, but some of them are specific to a
ethnic/religious/cultural group.

In cases such as the one in the Vukovar and Baranja region, many values that people had shared
during many years were denied during the war: the armed conflict needed it to make people feel
that they were really different, that, somehow, they had very few values in common.

*Within that type of context, the school curriculum on Common Cultural Heritage will help in rebuilding the broken values: mutual trust, tolerance, the acceptance of and respect for others and the different, the openness towards the religious, cultural and, in general, the openness towards diversity.*

Speaking of cultural values, the children and teenagers are, regardless of their ethnic or religious
identity, inclined to some universal values that arise from a dominant, popular culture. If we
observe this phenomenon as an advantage, we are again provided with a great source of
references for the design and implementation of a curriculum supporting common cultural heritage.

In the case of the Vukovar and Baranja region, the inspiration found in Harry Potter for example
(very popular among children), with the universal values that he promotes (friendship, humanity,
work, etc.) allowed to connect the story to the religious traditions and the myths of Eastern Croatia
and to serve as a link for comparison and explanation of the common cultural elements to children.

It is essential that the ethnic/religious groups present in a community or territory recognize and respect the cultural heritage of other groups as they would their own, but it is also essential that they also recognize and learn to enjoy the added value of diversity.

This should be one of the main ideas behind the curriculum on Common Cultural Heritage.
GOALS, ATTRIBUTES, SKILLS, CONTENTS AND METHODS

In this chapter we are sharing the ideas around the key elements for the design and implementation of this type of curriculum.

These ideas are based on the experience gained by NDN within the Croatian experience and also within other NDN educational projects in the Western Balkans Region, mainly Macedonia and Bosnia & Herzegovina.

One of the first lessons learnt from our field experience in the Vukovar and Baranja region is that the nature and complexity of this subject-matter require a careful and appropriate interconnection of educational goals, knowledge, contents and skills. None of these aspects should, therefore, be analyzed or developed in isolation.

Goals, attributes and skills

In the case of the Vukovar and Baranja region four basic goals and attributes of the curriculum on Common Cultural Heritage were defined

- Promotion of understanding and respecting others and the differences: tolerance and respect for diversity at all levels: age, gender, religion, political point of view, social class, etc.;
- Promotion of the love of and the pride towards the community/region as a whole;
- Fostering, preserving and promoting the common cultural heritage as a part of our identity, raising awareness about the value of cultural heritage within the ongoing globalisation processes;
- Learning about the roots and the tradition, knowing and respecting other cultures and the spiritual values of different civilization as the necessary counterbalance to globalisation and standardization

On the basis of the above-mentioned general goals and attributes, the educational goals were defined.

Simultaneously, a thorough discussion about the necessary skills to be developed by the students took place.
Educational Goals

**Knowledge**

- Learning about the local/regional:
  - Culture
  - Social customs and traditions
  - Historical heritage
  - Geographical characteristics

**Skills**

- Communication competences
- Socio-cultural competences
- Inter-cultural competences
- Media competences
- Development of pupils’ critical thinking
- Active participation of pupils in the process

It is important to highlight the fact that the Common Cultural Heritage subject, the goals and inputs related to historical and geographical attributes do not refer to the general knowledge that children and teens gain through “ordinary” history and geography classes, even though that knowledge will be useful in this subject.

Through the Common Cultural Heritage curriculum the students would have an opportunity to learn about local history and local geography more than it is assigned in the general curriculum and programme of those two subjects.

The way the students would be introduced to the historical and the geographical matters would also be diverse.

As it is described in detail later on when we refer to the methods in this kind of curriculum, the emphasis should be put on the active participation of students.

In other words, the students themselves should:

- *Explore their common heritage through independent and direct contact with the culture, the sites, the facts, the people and institutions that in the given territory work on the preservation of the heritage, and*

- *Reflect on the importance and influence of the heritage in everyday modern life and values.*
Concerning the skills, it is important to take the following into consideration:

- **Development of proper communication** is the basis of dialogue and therefore the starting point. This does not refer only to the basic politeness in conversation, but also to different ways of expression, verbal and non-verbal. Due to the fact that there will often be conversations on different types of comparisons, which can sometimes be very delicate, it is essential to teach students how to express themselves properly. Accordingly, the emphasis will be put on active listening, respecting other people’s opinions and empathy development.

- The main precondition for appropriate functioning in an inter-ethnic community is appropriate functioning in any kind of community. **Developing friendly and positively oriented individuals** is one of the main goals of this type of curriculum. Building up students’ self-confidence, orientation towards others in the form of readiness and willingness for cooperation and participation in mutual team work-those are the competences this subject fosters.

- The issue of **intercultural competences** is essential. Besides learning about one’s own culture and customs, it is equally important to raise interest and positive attitude towards customs and heritage of other ethnic groups and minorities in the community.

- The media (including the increasingly important social media) are an integral factor in pupils’ growing-up; therefore, their implementation in education is exceptionally important. Media can be the subject and the means of education. It is an inseparable part of cultural heritage. Within this type of curriculum the media are an inexhaustible source of content and methods; thus, it is very important to develop students’ **media competence**.

- **Development of students’ critical thinking** in order to make them responsible citizens and leaders of a democratic and multiethnic and multicultural society is also one of the goals of the curriculum. Unlike regular history class, where children are taught how to develop critical thinking about history, the curriculum on Common Cultural Heritage widens the development of critical thinking not only about history, but also about present society and culture that surround them today. Besides, the direct and personal contact and learning about cultural and spiritual heritage and other ethnic groups, allow a critical attitude towards prejudices that exist in the local community.

- This type of curriculum will **potentiate the development of students’ participation capacities**. The pupils will be encouraged to work individually or in group work, asking questions and searching for the answers themselves; they will be creative and not, as it is the case with the traditional way of teaching, passively waiting for someone else to offer them the answers. They will also be instructed about the purpose of learning, so that the process of learning would not just come down to a plain gathering of information. Consequently the accent will be put on independent seeking for information, the purpose of learning, critical thinking and development of creativity, through research and project strategies.
An essential part of the educational goals of this type of curriculum is to create *positive attitude*.

> The development of positive attitudes amongst students, especially towards their community/territory and its inhabitants, as well as the respect for their own and other ethnic groups and/or minorities cultures and customs, is the main task to be achieved with this type of curricula.

## Contents

It is obvious that the contents of a well-designed curriculum on Common Cultural Heritage should be totally connected to the context and reality of the territory where the curriculum will be implemented.

However the contents of the curriculum implemented in the Vukovar and Baranja region perhaps can be a reference for inspiration.

### Contents included in the curriculum on Common Cultural Heritage of the Region, Vukovar and Baranja region, Croatia

- History and mythology of the native land
- Migrations (emigrations & immigrations)
- Soil tillage and specific products
- Development of economy and crafts,
- Religious traditions, holidays and ways of celebrating holidays
- Local customs
- Relations among people who arrived from different places
- Development of urbanism & architecture
- Folklore and music
- Literature
- Art of painting and handicraft, traditional costumes
- Old sports
- Games for children and adults
- Development of communication & media: languages, literacy and types of alphabets and letters ways of "transferring" a message, public marketing, etc.
- Ad hoc contents that would interest pupils and parents (and/or suggested by them).
Methods for the delivery of the curriculum

Experience, and not only theory, has proved that the choice of methods is particularly important for the implementation of this type of curriculum: a substantial part of successful goal achievement is based on proper selection and appropriate use of learning methods.

A basic and distinctive characteristic of this subject is that students of different ethnic or religious groups learn about their common heritage together and therefore, children and teens and their interests play the main role in implementing the curriculum.

The students themselves are the main source of the content for this subject. They should be consulted about choosing the contents, media, tasks, topics and ways of work. The accent should be put on the students’ independence and reliance on each other.

Teachers’ work becomes much easier if the starting points are those things that the students already know; in other words: it is advisable to follow the didactic principle from known to unknown.

The experience and the existing knowledge of the pupils are the best foundations for the internalization of the new knowledge. For example, in learning interesting facts about the local history, much more will be accomplished if the mosaic is created from the pieces of knowledge that students already have on the given subject.

Since the subject is referring to common cultural and spiritual heritage, the contents could often be something the pupils themselves would be able to say the most about (for example a point of departure can be to share and discuss what they know about different local customs, celebrations, etc.).

Since heritage is a term covering many different issues in different areas, this subject will be taught by a multidisciplinary team of teachers, in cooperation with students and parents.

The role of the teacher is different from the one they have in the traditional teaching. Teachers are not in the centre of the teaching communication anymore. They appear as guides, facilitators, advisers and helpers. The appropriate and careful selection of methods will help develop critical thinking and encourage independence.

To achieve this kind of working atmosphere, a positive orientation is needed. It is very important to acknowledge and approve the effort of the student. The “mistakes” made by the student in this subject can mostly be reflected in no further involvement of the student in the work. If the teacher
realizes that a student does not show willingness to work, it is important to re-examine his/her motives and to positively stimulate him/her to work.

The role of the parents is also very important in implementation of this subject.

The family is the place where learning about the common cultural and spiritual heritage begins (knowledge about most of the customs is acquired from one’s parents, grandmothers, grandfathers), and cooperation of the parents among themselves and with the school is one of the ways to efficiently achieve some of the goals of this type of curriculum.

Since this type of curriculum is mainly a comparative approach to a multicultural and multiethnic community, within which the interethnic relations can still be painful and/or unresolved….

… it is essential to create a positive working environment. None of the goals is possible to achieve if the conditions do not provide working without fear and tension. It is important that the children and the teenagers feel comfortable to participate in the work.

Diversity of teaching content, activities, forms of work and media will contribute both to the motivation of students and the friendliness of learning.

Since this type of curriculum is conceived as an elective subject matter, with an open plan and programme, almost all the modern forms of work can be exploited.

A few ideas on possible forms of delivery (based on our Croatian experience):

- Project-based learning, developed within the school, the classes, or interested community groups, including field research
- Research, study of literature or local historical sources, stories, books, songs, museum, artifacts, etc.
- Interviews with the elders (grandmothers, grandfathers, old teachers, old religious leaders, etc.)
- Excursions and trips to different places in the country for visits to cultural-historical sites, natural sights, archaeological sites of historical and cultural heritage, religious monuments, cemeteries, etc.
- Plays, performances, dramatizations, games and exhibitions,
- Other ad-hoc activities depending on goals and content
Openness and flexibility are among the main principles for an efficient implementation of a curriculum of this kind. Therefore, the curriculum should be created openly in both the horizontal and vertical sense.

Namely, considering the fact that the teaching will mostly be project, field or research based, students of different grades will be able to participate together in the same projects. In this case, the younger pupils will be given some easier tasks, whereas the older students will be given an opportunity to develop their potentials by handling more complex tasks.

Considering all the goals that the curriculum should have, the involvement of the local community is of very high importance.

The involvement of the local population can be realized indirectly or directly:

- **Indirectly**, in the way of making public presentations of pupils’ projects, and
- **Directly**, in the way that the members of the local community actively participate in the projects created by children (e.g. restoration of an old historical building, preservation of the environment, cleaning up a certain part of the town or village that is an important part of the heritage of the community, etc.). This also includes work in-cooperation with cultural and minority associations.

As we have already mentioned, the media have an important role in this subject. Pupils can use the Internet for their research, as the biggest and the most available base of information, but they can also present their work over the Internet. Besides the Internet, newspapers, TV and radio can also be used in the work related to the curriculum, especially when working on projects realized in cooperation with the local community.

When possible, the use of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, etc. is very much advisable.
MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As it was pointed out in the previous chapter, it is essential in this kind of curriculum to treat educational goals, knowledge, contents and skills at the same level.

Consequently, the monitoring and the evaluation process are more complex than in most curricula, where priority is often given only to educational goals.

In the monitoring and evaluation it is particularly important to follow up on the following:

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<th>Monitoring and Evaluation Issues to Follow up</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Level of active participation of participating students</td>
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<td>2. Level of independence and the attitude of a pupil towards the colleagues he/she worked with</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Level of positive attitude of the students in relation to the community and the common heritage</td>
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<td>4. Principle of positive orientation (to focus on what a pupil knows and to highlight the positive; not to look for what the pupil does not know and to punish him/her for the negative)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. To encourage the development of the ability of self-evaluation (the students themselves are stimulated to recognize what they did right and what they did wrong).</td>
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In the case of the Vukovar and Baranja region there were no specific, assigned textbooks, the approach was to start implementing the curriculum, and after a pre-agreed period of time to produce a handbook for teachers based on the materials collected for the activities and the inputs provided by the monitoring process.

Teachers and educators should be encouraged to write down and document their experiences, the ways they worked on specific themes (in the form of portfolio).

If working through projects, a team of teachers, parents and pupils can jointly estimate the successfulness of the project and make a detailed evaluation, listing all the advantages and disadvantages of the methods and forms of work the project was using.

Students can significantly contribute to the monitoring and evaluation by presenting their work. Using the Internet, in the form of a web page (or a Facebook page) about their work, the pupils can constantly inform the society on the ongoing activities and projects and in this way they also get an insight into their own work, which can have far-reaching positive consequences.

The presentation of the projects (besides presentations in the schools) can be shared in the local newspapers or on TV or local radio; visual presentations can take place in the local community sites, exhibitions, fairs and festivals. In this way the local community gets involved, which is, as we
have already mentioned, one of the important issues when approaching the importance of the common cultural heritage.

Through teachers’ notes, group overviews, and pupils’ presentations, the future material for a better implementation of the curriculum in the future is being created (including the production of a handbook for teachers).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As mentioned in the introduction, this publication has been made possible owing to the work done in Croatia since 2006 by a group of very capable and enthusiastic professionals.

In the Vukovar and Baranja region they developed and implemented the project “Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region” by which this publication has been inspired.

The team was integrated by:

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