

**MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS AND THE INCLUSIVE  
DIMENSION OF WELL-IMPLEMENTED COMMUNITY  
PRACTICES ON BOOSTING THE SCHOOL ETHOS**

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**Abstract:** *Multicultural schools are not merely schools where students of different ethnic groups or nationalities learn together, but primarily they are schools with an ethos. The facets and characteristics of such schools impact the learning trajectories of students and inclusive practices are the norm there. The effective implementation of such practices, the strategies for keeping the learning environment inclusive, alongside preserving identities and fostering developmental pathways are core values in multicultural schools. The article aims at highlighting the importance of salient features of such schools and the implementation of case studies provides models and frameworks to be observed. Furthermore, a skill set that promotes critical thinking and problem-solving in the context of blended learning, alongside the face-to-face one, are core competences in a multicultural learning environment. The identity construction of each ethnic group needs to blend into an educational environment that fosters unswerving cross-cultural teaching. Inclusion and integration are part of a student-centered approach to teaching, in schools where means and methods are tailored to address the specific needs of the student, turning a dependable child into an autonomous adult, regardless of the diverse socio-economic or cultural backgrounds students come from.*

**Key words:** multicultural schools; inclusion; ethnic communities; school ethos.

Multicultural schools viewed in term of their salient features and the unswerving cross-cultural societal interactions must not be pinpointed only with reference to international schools as a byproduct of a globalized world, but also in contexts of traditionally multicultural societies, where different ethnic groups have peacefully lived and developed into strong multicultural communities with effect on educational institutions. One such example is the case study of The Technological Highschool "The Danube Gorge" Moldova Nouă in Caraș-Severin, which provides models and frameworks to be observed.

Taking a close look at the demographics of the area we know that Banat region has traditionally been perceived as one undergoing several waves of colonization over the centuries with Hungarians, Bulgarians, Czechs, Croatians, Germans and Serbians ending up living together in strong multicultural communities. Furthermore, it is a fact that by the sixth century Historians mention that "The Lower Danube territories were inhabited by a population structure made up by Dacians and Slavs"(Cerović, 2005), and it is common knowledge that by Slav we mean Serbians, alongside other Slavic populations, and more specifically the Danube Gorge Serbians are now referred to as being in a state of "acculturation"(Bulzan, 2007) to the Romanian life. And Cerović takes the data to modern times and his book makes reference to the" decline in population of the Serbians and other ethnic groups, both in the" absolute and the relative aspect"" (Cerović, 2005), this being also proved by the data collected by the National Institute of Statistics (INS). By looking at the data provided by The Institute for Research on National Minorities (INSMP) census with reference to Caraș-Severin, the structure of the population at the 2002 population census was as follows: 88,25% Romanians, 1,75% Hungarians, 2,38% Roma, 1,88% Croatians, 1,84% Germans, 1,82% Serbians, 1,06 % Ukrainans, 0,74% Czechs and 0,28% other ethnic groups. To prove the decline in number it is worth taking a look at the 2011 population census, which indicates a significant drop in the minority population: 82,52 % Romanian, 0,99% Hungarian, 2,46% Roma, 0,84% Ukrainian, 0,98% German, 3,42% Serbian and Croatian and 0,52% Czech. Ultimately the 2021 census, conducted online and with the remark that only by the end of June 2023 the final results will be published has widened the gap even further. And to analyze only two example which are more specific to the Modova Nouă and the Danube Gorge are, if there still are 3408 Serbians in Caraș-Severin, only 45% of these speak Serbian, whereas with reference to the Czech population out of the 909 Czechs only 40% of these speak the language. The decline in

population is obvious, yet, on the other hand the new generations may carry the local element further without even knowing how much of a particular inherited tradition is Croatian, German, Czech or Romanian. Thus, the identity construction of each ethnic group has blended with the dominant Romanian culture into a multicultural society that foster a multicultural education.

School ethos, on the other hand, has encountered numerous connotations, defined by Donnelly as a 'fashionable but nebulous term', and by others as a 'notoriously difficult term to bring into clear focus' (McLaughlin, 2005). Following a study conducted in Northern Ireland, there is a discrepancy between the theoretical definitions and 'the observed practices and interactions of school members' (Donnelly, 2000). Seen by others as when defined as school or educational ethos, it is very clearly analyzed by Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behavior in Schools (SAGRABIS) in a study published in 2017. The study concludes, among others, that school climate alongside school ethos is essential in ensuring 'social and emotional wellbeing and mental health for all in schools'. Dingham adds a new layer and suggests that a positive school ethos is to be understood only in conjunction with a strong leadership (Dingham, 2007) and in the Romanian literature, an article entitled 'A plea for community educational ethos' actually makes a plea for a 'paideic symphony' at the community level (Cucos, 2013) and for a symbiosis of school, family and community values, interactions and behavior to be taught. As for the school ethos, inferring from the numerous definitions, several concepts can be put together to provide the elements that define the term: inclusion and security, a state of emotional comfort, physical safety at school, joint decision-making processes (school staff – students or pupils – family – the extended community), skilled teachers to respond to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century children and teenagers in the context of blended learning, and thus extended learning communities.

Multicultural schools display specific facets and characteristics with impact on the learning trajectories of students, where inclusive practices are the norm. The key words that define a multicultural school are: multilingualism, cultural exchanges, inclusion, reaching across racial barriers, appreciation of the other, cultural competencies, heritage, well-adjusted students. In response, boosting the school ethos in multicultural schools would include collaborative means, tactfulness in tackling culturally sensitive issues, empathy, equity, open-minded staff and well-socialised children, an empowering educational

environment. Westheimer and Kahne do not fail to recognize how important it is for all schools, not just the multicultural ones to 'seek to prepare students to improve society by critically analysing and addressing social issues and injustices' (2004), critical analysis which is part of parental preoccupation from early age (Roman et al., 2021). The previously mentioned case study of "The Technological Highschool" "The Danube Gorge" Moldova Nouă in Caraș-Severin, beyond the school population structure displays specific features of multicultural schools:

- multilingualism: four mother tongues are taught, respectively Serbian, Czech, German and, obviously, Romanian; additionally English and French are taught as foreign languages;
- identity preservation and cultural exchange: school show events that include traditional dances, folklore, music, poetry, gastronomy and specific attire;
- an inclusive learning environment in pursuit of common educational goals and civic engagement for the benefit of the local community – the whole Danube Gorge;
- multiple developmental pathways combined with positive career aims and goals: vocational routes, from tourism to engineering domains, theoretical from Natural Sciences to Informatics and Philological studies;
- curricular adaptations, language content integrations and customization of school syllabus.

To sum up, multicultural learning environments, schools in particular, consistently expose students to a variety of cultures facilitating thus improved academic results and an active citizenship in the adult life, inclusive everyday practices, they value each ethnic community as and emulate an inclusive school ethos that grants equal status, cross-cultural/ ethnic/ racial interactions and prejudice reduction.

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