

## PREMISES FOR ELABORATING A TRANS-DISCIPLINARY DIDACTIC AS PART OF THE INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

*The approaches in order to define a trans-disciplinary didactics suppose theoretical developments, in the spirit of postmodern education paradigms, elaboration of methodological frameworks and operational tools in order to develop key competences and those specific to the target domain. The article firstly presents arguments and premises that support the legitimacy of developing a trans-disciplinary didactics as part of the intercultural education; secondly, the process and results of an empiric micro-research are being presented, based on analyzing subjects' methodological conceptions and opinions and foreseeing the impact of being aware of and applying trans-disciplinary curricular strategies as part of the intercultural education field. The basic tool of the impact study is the questionnaire, applied to a sample of 120 subjects (didactic staff, students, experts). The results achieved confirm a high level of awareness regarding the necessity of developing trans-disciplinary structures as part of the intercultural education, and their adhesion to strategies and modalities in order to optimize the intercultural curriculum-intercultural education activities' trans-disciplinary didactics relation.*

**Keywords:** *intercultural education, intercultural curriculum, trans-disciplinary didactics, intercultural competences, constructivist strategies, meta-cognitive strategies.*

### **1. Theoretical framework**

At the time we speak, many theoretical studies and explorer researches confirm the supposition that intercultural education represents a solution to problems of the contemporary world and the first modality as part of the process in order to achieve desirable values and attitudes as part of the multicultural society. The European educational policies and the specialty literature have developed institutional and curricular strategies in order to adequate and process the contents of the intercultural education, and thus to

develop intercultural abilities and competences as far as children, youngsters and adults are concerned.

Regarding formal education, the intercultural curriculum represents a multidimensional educational project, structured on trans-disciplinary training situations, relevant in order to develop and assert pupils' intercultural competences. In a broader sense, the intercultural curriculum includes the totality of curricular products, which specify the purposes and contents of training based on values of the intercultural education, as well as the strategies that facilitate acquiring social learning experiences and acknowledging competences and abilities desirable as part of the multicultural society.

In a functional sense, the intercultural competences represent categories of the transverse competences, which include cognitive, axiological and action elements manifested as part of multiple circumstances of the educational field, marked by interactions between different cultures: "the situational framework, experiences field, resources framework, action framework and evaluation framework" (Jonnaert, Ettayebi, Defise, 2010,79-81).

From a structural perspective, the intercultural competences include multiple socio-cultural elements, which can be operationalized as part of learning situations based on experiencing multicultural contexts. Traditionally speaking, elements belonging to intercultural competence have been defined in relation with modern languages didactics, as part of the curricular area designated to comprehending culture and developing abilities in order to relate one's own culture with that of the studied language (Byram, Zarate, 1997, 13-21) :

- Attitudes of interest in other persons, of studying other societies and cultures;
- Capacities in order to give a relative sense to one's own conception and system of values;
- Capacities in order to relate one's own cultural values with those of others;
- Abilities in order to solve problems arised as part of the contact between cultures, subsequently achieved to comprehending and developing operational structures that intermedate the relation between ethnocentrism and cultural alterity;
- Capacities of complex analysis of some cultural contexts, which express cultural specifications, as well as dynamic aspects of the interaction between cultures.
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The time being, the concept of intercultural competence is extended to an ensemble of cognitive, affective-motivational, action structures cognitive, values and characteristics in order to facilitate assuming and accomplishing as part of the permanent education's formal, non-formal and informal contexts, intercultural education's purposes and specific processes: intercultural communication, enculturation, acculturation, cultural integration, socialization.

Given this conceptual evolution of the intercultural competence and in order to develop intercultural curriculum's operational aspect, we find it appropriate to analyze the situation from multiple points of view: a) the necessity in order to develop a methodological framework of the intercultural education, situated in a trans-disciplinary didactics; b) the relation intercultural curriculum-activities' didactics of intercultural education, trans-disciplinary typed; c) the essence and premises in order to develop the trans-disciplinary didactics, as part of the intercultural education; d) the foreseen impact in order to elaborate such didactics, as far as the didactic staff and students to be teachers are concerned.

The purposes, contents and methodology of the intercultural education have a strong transverse character, and the competences aimed are developed through training processes conceived and developed in accordance with actual postmodern orientations. These paradigms have influenced:

- Reconsideration of specialty didactics' role as part of educational sciences, by placing them as part of training's general theory and methodology and educational curriculum's issue;
- Development of strategies and methodologies in order to teach-learn-evaluate, based on a cognitive-constructive background;
- Development of didactics of the curricular field and areas, adequated in order to emphasize virtues of the interdisciplinary curricular structures: facilitating transfers, developing superior capacities, focusing didactic approaches on developing competences and achieving desirable values as part of the contemporary society;
- Undertaking approaches in order to conceive trans-disciplinary didactics, in order to methodologically articulate the most advanced structures of the curricular integration.

The trans-disciplinary didactics as part of the intercultural education approach the methodological component of the intercultural curriculum, and rationally and creatively operationalize the model of curricular planning based on curricular competences and strategies, in order to train intercultural competences as part of training processes that transcend school disciplines. The trans-disciplinary discipline has the role of methodological reference in planning and implementing cross-curricular themes and intercultural education activities, of support in order to assert teacher's roles of facilitator

of learning experiences as part of intercultural contexts, of tutorship and advisory as far as pupils' specific self-training capacities are regarded. Developing this type of didactics takes place as a pedagogical construct, whose center is represented by intercultural education's axiomatic and curricular system and whose didactic transposition is accomplished in accordance with psycho-pedagogical, curricular, social and ethical principles of inculcate intercultural values.

The trans-disciplinary didactics' characteristics as part of the intercultural education are:

- Underlying the theoretical speech on theories of learning psychology, determined by cognitivism and constructivism;

- Defining intercultural education's purposes in a cognitivist-constructivist way, so that they guide the training process in order to win a direct experience, by "comprehending, primary analyzing specific information, shaping mental images, using abstract mechanisms of comprehension" (Joița, 2005, 77-80), by placing pupils in problematic situations of cultural diversity, where they have the opportunity to assert capacities of comprehending cultural alterity, empathy, networking and intercultural communication;

- The transverse approach of intercultural education's axiological and procedural contents, through modalities of curricular organization that are specific to trans-disciplinarity: horizontal, vertical, themes, instrumental trans-disciplinarity (D'Hainaut, 1981). The horizontal trans-disciplinarity supposes identifying learning situations as part of school disciplines, based on intercultural education's values and practices; the vertical trans-disciplinarity is being accomplished through learning situations identified as part of some school discipline, which practices capacities and abilities in order to interpret and operate intercultural education's concepts and values; the themestrans-disciplinarity—by identifying problematic fields, which require cognitive capacities and pupils' solving abilities; the instrumental trans-disciplinarity supposes supplying tools, in order to facilitate the development of pupils' intercultural competences and their social performances assertion, as part of the cultural diversity context;

- Describing training strategies, in order to facilitate experience based learning (by solving problematic situations), learning through research and finding, self-management of training capacities and abilities specific to interculture: strategies focused on pupil, interactive strategies, heuristic and creative strategies, metacognitive strategies. The training strategies promoted by the trans-disciplinary didactics as part of the intercultural education are adequated to constructivist paradigm's principles and training's socio-central model, alternative to behaviorist training, which is focused on dividing

behavioral knowledge and purposes as part of school disciplines. Thus, are prevailing training situations based on purposes with a higher degree of generality, relative to values, attitudes, contextual learning, learning through cooperation;

- Adopting strategies specific to intercultural management, in order to optimize the cross-curricular coordination of the aimed intercultural education's components, to manage, monitor and optimize cultural personal/group relations and to streamline intercultural communication;

- Focusing on evaluation issues, which approach the specific of the intercultural competences' evaluation: the training evaluation paradigm, holistic evaluation criteria, the prevail of process evaluation in comparison with products' evaluation, focusing on alternative methods of evaluation, meta-evaluation.

## **2. Research**

The empiric investigation has been planned and developed in order to collect and analyze data to the purpose of the scientific research project *Directions of developing the intercultural curriculum, from the perspective of the European educational dimension*, financed by the Romanian Academy, as part of the POSDRU project 159/1.5/S/136077 "Romanian culture and European cultural models: research, synchronism, durability".

The purposes and methodology of the micro-research have been defined in accordance with one of the research's partial hypothesis, intercultural curriculum themed:

*If the methodological model of the intercultural curriculum has a consistent scientific foundation, curricular references and operational didactic methodologies, then it can generate a high level of awareness and it can facilitate the development of the didactic staff's methodological competences, as part of the intercultural education field.*

### **2.1. Objectives**

The purposes of the empiric micro-research are:

1. Studying subjects' methodological perceptions and opinions, which refer to the necessity and development modalities of a trans-disciplinary didactics as part of the intercultural education field.

2. Systematization of data relevant to the impact study and useful in order to define the methodology of the research project *Directions of*

developing the intercultural curriculum, from the perspective of the European educational dimension.

## ***2.2. The sample of subjects***

The structure of the micro-research's sample of subjects has similar characteristics with the sample of the before mentioned research project and it has followed the selection requirements based on providing the representativeness of the categories of subjects as part of the educational system, the equality of chances, as far as the gender, age and socio-professional status are regarded. The sample of 120 subjects has the following composition:

- 50 persons belonging to the didactic staff teaching as part of the pre-University education, in school units all over Dolj and Gorj counties;
- 30 teachers teaching as part of the University education, with expertise in socio-human field and educational sciences;
- 40 students attending Pedagogy as part of primary and pre-school education, University of Craiova.

## ***2.3. Tools***

The main tool of the empiric micro-research is represented by the questionnaire. The items of the questionnaire have been grouped on multiple sub-themes, corresponding to the variables in order to operationalize the particular hypothesis of the project *Directions of developing the intercultural curriculum, from the perspective of the European educational dimension*. The data achieved by analyzing answers has been correlated with information achieved as part of individual interviews and focus-groups activities. The variables of the impact study, which include multiple criteria in order to distribute answers, are:

- a) Premises in order to conceive the trans-disciplinary didactics as part of the intercultural education field (items 3-8);
- b) Problematics specific to the trans-disciplinary didactics (items 9-15);
- c) Modalities in order to elaborate, develop and promote the trans-disciplinary didactics (items 16-20);
- d) The foreseen impact in studying the trans-disciplinary didactics (items 21-24).

### ***1.2. Results and data analysis***

The answers of the subjects have been distributed on the criteria above mentioned, being selected in order to be analyzed the following:

- The answers that have indicated both of the intensity stages “to a large extent” and “to a larger extent”, regarding trans-disciplinary didactics’ theoretical support and methodological options;

- The open answers, which indicate and argue modalities in order to define the trans-disciplinary didactics and to develop specific competences, during the course of didactic staff’s initial and continual training.

The analysis of the data achieved reveal the following results of the empiric research:

- Premises in order to elaborate the trans-disciplinary didactics as part of the intercultural education:

- 1) Epistemological foundation on cognitive, pedagogical constructivist, socio-constructivist paradigms;

- 2) Capitalization of postmodern psychological theories: theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1996), social intelligence (Goleman, 2006), critical thinking (Boisvert, 1999, Dumitru, 2000, Steele, Kurtis, Temple, 2000), meta-cognition;

- 3) Adopting integrated curriculum’s methodological principles (Potolea, 1983);

- 4) Capitalization of postmodern curricular models: the model of curricular planning focused on competences, managerial models of the curriculum’s implementation (apud Bunăiașu, 2011), strategies and methodologies in order to relevantly evaluate competences’ assessment (Manolescu, 2010).

*Table 1. Data regarding the premises in order to elaborate the trans-disciplinary didactics as part of the intercultural education*

<b>Groups</b>	Criteria on no. 1	Criteria on no. 2	Criteria on no. 3	Criteria on no. 4
Pre-University didactic staff	66%	62%	76%	70%
University didactic staff-	80%	76,66%	83,33%	76,66%
Students	67,50%	72,50%	82,50%	72,50%

- Problematics specific to the trans-disciplinary didactics:

1. Modalities of curricular integration of the intercultural education as part of school disciplines, through interdisciplinary syntheses and trans-disciplinary approaches;

2. intercultural curriculum – intercultural education activities’ didactics relation;

3. Methodological aspects regarding the planning, implementation and evaluation of

4. training situations as part of intercultural education field;
5. Development of pupils' intercultural competences through experience based learning and meta-cognition;
6. Methodology of acculturation, enculturation, socialization and cultural integration processes (Gavreliuc, 2011);
7. Intercultural management, regarding multicultural school groups.

Table 2. Data regarding the problematics specific to trans-disciplinary didactics

Groups	Criterion no. 1	Criterion no. 2	Criterion no. 3	Criterion no. 4	Criterion no. 5
Pre-University didactic staff	82%	54%	82%	42%	48%
University didactic staff-	90%	73,33%	86,66%	76,66%	83,33%
Student	85%	55%	85%	45%	52,50%

• Modalities in order to elaborate, develop and promote the trans-disciplinary didactics:

1) Elaborating conceiving principles, intercultural curriculum elements and learning situations, as part of interdisciplinary teams: experts (in psychology, education sciences, sociology, anthropology), education decisional factors, teachers teaching as part of University and pre-University education, students, local community agents;

2) Accomplishing an impact study of trans-disciplinary didactics' elaboration framework as part of the intercultural education field;

3) The curricular integration of the trans-disciplinary didactics' tested elements and elaboration of methodological guides for teachers and learning support for pupils;

4) Promoting trans-disciplinary didactics' role as part of academic communities and didactic staff, organizing training sessions for the didactic staff.

Table 3. Data regarding modalities of elaboration, development and promotion of the trans-disciplinary didactics

Groups	Criterion no. 1	Criterion no. 2	Criterion no. 3	Criterion no. 4



Pre-University didactic staff	82%	68%	76%	74%
University didactic staff <sup>2</sup>	73,33%	86,66%	90%	86,66%
Student	77,50%	67,50%	72,50%	82,50%

- The foreseen impact of studying the trans-disciplinary didactics:
  - 1) Increasing didactic staff's awareness level, regarding intercultural education's curricular role and approach;
  - 2) Developing didactic staff's competences, regarding the intercultural education's trans-disciplinary approach;
  - 3) developing pupils' intercultural competences;
  - 4) increasing pupils' social performances, as part of multicultural groups.

*Table 4. Data regarding the foreseen impact of the trans-disciplinary didactics*

<b>Groups</b>	Criterion no. 1	Criterion no. 2	Criterion no. 3	Criterion no. 4
Pre-University didactic staff	70%	68%	66%	70%
University didactic staff <sup>2</sup>	76,66%	73,33%	76,66%	73,33%
Student	72,50%	70%	67,50%	62,50%

Analysis of the impact study's results reveals significant differences between categories of subjects regarding three variables: intercultural curriculum – intercultural education activities' didactics relation; intercultural processes methodology; intercultural management. Given these, academic specialists have assessed to a larger extent these variables, which can be explained by their expertise as part of the intercultural education field. It's worth mentioning that the three variables are part of the same category of items, the one of the trans-disciplinary didactics issue, which is less approached as part of the speciality literature and didactic staff's training programs, in comparison with school disciplines didactics' classic topics.

The results achieved confirm subjects' high level of awareness regarding:

- The necessity in order to increase the percentage of intercultural education activities;

- Intercultural education's curricular approach, mainly as part of the integrated curriculum;
- Defining the epistemological and methodological framework in order to develop the trans-disciplinary didactics, as part of the intercultural education;
- Foreseeing a long term impact of the trans-disciplinary didactics, in order to facilitate the development of didactic staff's methodological competences and increase pupils' social performances, as part of the cultural diversity context.

The results of the micro-research confirm, as far as the methodological coordinate is regarded, one of the partial hypothesis of the research project *Directions of developing the intercultural curriculum, from the perspective of the European educational dimension*. Thus, the trans-disciplinary didactics describes operational methodologies in order to accomplish intercultural education's processes, which can facilitate the development of didactic staff's methodological competences, as part of the intercultural education field.

### 3. Conclusions

The systematized theoretical premises and micro-research's results represent a useful data basis as part of the researches focused on developing the trans-disciplinary didactics as part of the intercultural education field. These can be correlated with the approaches as part of the intercultural curriculum field, with a focus on those regarding curricular transformations and capitalization of social experiences, as part of the multi-culture context (Banks, J.A., Banks, C., 1997, Nedelcu, 2010), with the prospect of capitalization principles in order to synchronize cultural values as part of the curricular plan (Bădescu, 2003). From this point of view, the trans-disciplinary didactics will be developed on multiple coordinates: a) the didactic staff teaching socio-human disciplines, approached from a postmodern perspective; b) the intercultural curriculum's operational models; c) the experimental and empiric validation of the methodological models used as part of the intercultural education; d) adapting the training situations to the specific of intercultural processes and cultural contexts.

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