

Summary

Characteristics of the self-image and model imitation of adolescent Gypsy pupils

This essay is intended to introduce the development and characteristics of identity in Gypsy pupils in early adolescence. The essay is based on the findings of a survey conducted in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County in the school-year 1998/99 among Grade 7 and 8 students.

When selecting the pupils to be examined, the most important aspect was that they accept their identity. The categorization by the schools and the proportion of Gypsy students within the classes were also taken into consideration.

The characteristics of the self-image were explored by means of a list consisting of 30 personal qualities, a self-characterization, and an attitude scale related to the self-characterization. The manifestation of social factors affecting the development of self-image was assessed through the micro-sociological analysis of the classes.

The characteristics of model imitation were examined through the analysis of the relation between Gypsy pupils and those having social roles, of the pupils' willingness to imitate their parents, and of their future prospects.

The data were processed by using the methods of descriptive and content analyses, which, where it was possible, were added to by the SPSS data analysing programme.

On the basis of the findings of the survey, both teacher training and the pedagogical programmes facilitating Gypsy students' academic performance can be made more efficient. It is advisable to add this aspect to the current curriculum of teacher training, and to introduce projects that facilitate the reinforcement of motivation for performance and the extension of the evaluation system. Through ensuring high quality education, the pupils' adaptation to their environment will become more successful.

Doctoral Thesis

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Introduction

Surveys and researches on the situation of Gypsies have been conducted in great numbers, all too often with contradicting findings, over the past few years. They, however, did not bring forth any significant changes in the situation of either Gypsy adults or children and youths. But each of these surveys and researches confirmed that Gypsies were the victims of the political and economic changes in Hungary in the 1990s. Their situation was worsened by the fact that the slow progress of their integration into the society during the Socialist era was wasted by the large-scale unemployment. They again got to the periphery of society, and they deem their situation more and more hopeless. Their low-level qualification further stabilized their unemployed status, and, consequently, their poverty.

Hopelessness put them in a critical situation, and they give way to their dissatisfaction more and more openly. It seems that the solution of the problem cannot be postponed any longer, as it is the society's inner peace and cohesion that is in danger.

Democratic societies consider education as a means of ensuring social peace and cohesion. This essay is not intended to deal with to what degree education can decrease social disparities and what compensating strategies it applies. Reinforcing impartiality in education (Radó, 2001, p 33), however, can mitigate social and ethnic disadvantages, if endeavours are made to improve the quality of education.

Based on these, the provision of equal opportunities constitutes an educational strategy which creates the bases and conditions for quality education. In order to achieve this, however, our viewpoints concerning Gypsies have to be reviewed and changed. Willingness has to be shown to give up our stereotypes and prejudices, and every form of discrimination and segregation has to be eliminated from our relation and coexistence.

Otherwise those negative stereotypes that put the Gypsies into a certain social group will prevent Gypsies from accepting their identity. And this would question the success of the minority policy that is based on the awareness of ethnic identity. Disadvantageous discrimination and segregation owing to cultural differences will stabilize the Gypsies' ethnic identity as a defective identity. (Erős, 1996, p 6). And identification with defective models implies difficulties and generates tension in the individual. This is added to by the negative social association inherent in Gypsy identity, which is why the individual who is to identify himself with the model will have an unpleasant feeling about the identity.

Despite all these, the Gypsies' awareness of their ethnic identity is getting stronger, and they are more and more determined to be referred to as an ethnic group, and to enforce their rights as such, in the field of both politics and educational policy. Plans concerning the catching-up of Gypsy pupils contain strategies that recognize their cultural differences and aim to improve their representation. The emphasis on their being different is concomitant of the awakening of the ethnic awareness. On the one hand, however, identity built on differences further increases the segregation of

Gypsies and prevents their social integration. On the other hand, their self-definition and recognition as an ethnic group may enhance their self-esteem.

A well-established, flexible identity can be a pedagogical goal, as it ensures the integrity of personality and facilitates socialization, which, in turn, contributes to the preservation of identity. The individual creates a self-image in relation to others, and this self-image clearly determines with whom the individual is identical and with whom he is not. (Köcski M, 1996, p 135) Identity is created as a result of rational comparison.

This essay strives for presenting the image adolescent Gypsy pupils created of themselves as a result of social comparison. This image can be considered a kind of mirror as well, because its content can be compared to the one we and the society hold of Gypsies.

Identity and self-image

Self-identity is none other than a conscious self-experience created by the interaction of social reality. (Personalistic psychology, 1998, p 289, Erikson) Self-identity, which ensures the congruence of our personality and enables us to better accommodate ourselves to the world, contains cognitive elements (self-concept) and affective elements that are manifested in our relationship with ourselves (self-evaluation). These two elements together create self-image, which contains features the personality considers parts of himself.

Our knowledge of ourselves and our qualities carry social and cultural meanings. These are the bases for our social and self-identity. Self-image is the result of social experiences, which make the individual take up other people's attitudes towards him. The individual then organizes his experiences on the basis of these attitudes, and these will control his behaviour. According to Mead (Mead, 1973), our self-image is the reflection of other people's image of us, embedded in the varied processes of social co-existence.

According to Ágnes Hankiss (1987, pp 193-197), identity is the subjective experience of the continuity and identity of individual existence and the unity of those capabilities, qualities, roles, behaviour patterns, values, and personal history with which the person can be identified.

In order to maintain the continuity of personal existence, it is indispensable to have a constant relationship and contact with the social reality around us. (Zs. Vajda, 1996, p 9) The basis of this relationship are the moral values which make the individual impose moral obligations on himself. The integrity of personality and the balance of identity can be achieved by ensuring that our selection of values conforms to the social requirements and the personal qualities that ensure our individuality.

The cognitive elements which are part of our identity are built upon one another in a hierarchical way. The principle of hierarchical arrangement derives from the individual's personal history and the experience of personal importance. The elements of identity exist in the culture of the given society in the form of roles, social categories and identity models. Identity models are the results of collective experience, and they offer comprehensive rules concerning behaviour and social strategies. Tajfel (1998, p 140) notes that these models are like screenplays, and always postulates the

act of comparison with others and evaluation. The individual creates his social identity from these alternative identity models in a unique and individual way by means of selection and exclusion. By the imitation of adults' model and the development of autonomous behaviour, the individual can learn to solve conflicts through understanding and can grasp the balance between his self and the other individual (Mérei, 1989). This balance is ensured by the experience of collectiveness, because the self highlights the other and attributes significance to him, while the individual itself becomes the focus of other people's interest.

The above description is intended to emphasize the significance and role of social and collective experiences in the interpretation and development of identity. As a consequence, personal identity gains an emphasized social feature, which is described as social identity by the special literature, although in reality it is inseparable from the personal self, and is part of self-identity.

Subject, purpose, and methods of the research

This essay examines the changes in Gypsy pupils' identity during early adolescence. The examination is based on the findings of a survey conducted in the school-year 1998/99. Conducted among Grade 7 and 8 pupils, the survey aimed to explore the characteristics of the Gypsy pupils' self-image and model imitation. The survey involved three Grade 7 classes and four Grade 8 classes in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County. The principal criterion of selecting the pupils to be examined was that they had to accept their Gypsy identity. In order to meet this criterion, special attention was given to that all of the selected pupils take part in a catching-up program supported by the Ministry of the Interior, or in other pedagogical programmes supported and monitored by, for example, the Soros Foundation. The categorization by the school was also taken into consideration, that is, which pupils does the school consider Gypsy. The third criterion when selecting the pupils was the proportion of Gypsy pupils within the class. In this regard, the classes were grouped as follows: classes where the proportion of Gypsy pupils was less than 20% (K/7 and A/8 sub-samples); where it was between 20-50% (K/8 and M/7 sub-samples); and where it was over 50% (A/8 and A/7 sub-samples). Classes having more than 50% Gypsy pupils included a class where 100% of the pupils were Gypsy (Ny/8 sub-sample). The proportion of Gypsy pupils was considered to be a factor of group dynamics. The presence and proportion of Gypsy pupils in the class are a cohesive force within their community, and are capable of influencing the atmosphere within the group.

Grade 7 and 8 pupils were selected because adolescence is a crucial age in terms of the development of identity, especially that of social identity. It is then when the patterns and individual strategies for creating relations with others are developed, and the success of relations made during this age is an important factor in the development of self-evaluation. (Buda B., 1998)

The characteristics of self-image were explored by using a list of 30 personal qualities, self-characterization, and an attitude scale related to the self-characterization (for the method used for the compilation of the list, see Getting to know the personality by Kósáné Ormai Vera (OKI, 1988); and for the questionnaire see the Annexes). The purpose of the list of personal qualities was to explore the real and

desired self-image, and the self-characterization aimed to allow for the examination of the explicit features of the self-image. Features are explicit in the sense that the individual accepts identity with the categories contained therein, and applies them for the manifestation of his identity. For the examination of the differences between the real and the desired self-image, the average number of personal qualities per pupil, and the choices per qualities were calculated. In the task related to the self-characterization, the characteristics of self-image were arranged in categories with the help of content analysis. For the determination of the characteristics of self-evaluation, the weighed mean value of the results of the attitude scale was calculated.

The temporal dimension of the self-image was deduced by the examination of short- and long-term goals and the position of the pupils in relation to their parents. (Questionnaire: questions 1, 2 and 3). The effectiveness of social factors affecting the development of self-image is explored through the micro-sociological analysis of the classes. Sociometrical indices standardized by Ferenc Mérei and his colleagues were used for the analysis (Mérei, 1972, 1998). The analysis covered the characteristics of the structure of the classes, their atmosphere, and the differentiation and hierarchy within the group. The differentiation and hierarchy were examined in terms of social importance and the division of roles. The relation between the differentiation and the academic performance was also taken into consideration, and explored by the comparison of the pattern of division and the academic hierarchy.

The motives of social rejection were explored on the basis and by the categorization of the answers to the question "Why do you think certain pupils are not liked by his fellow pupils" (Questionnaire, questions 1 and 6).

For the examination of the characteristics of model imitation, the relation between the Gypsy pupils and their fellows having social roles, and the Gypsy pupils' willingness to follow the model of their parents were analysed. The pupils' future prospects were also examined.

The examination was extended to the form-teachers, too, because in this way the relation between parents and children, and the parents' expectations of their children could also be assessed. The relation between the children and their parents, and the parents' expectations are considered to be factors that influence identity.

The data were interpreted by using the methods of descriptive analysis and content analysis, and, where it was possible, with the help of the SPSS data analysing programme. The survey covered a total of 117 pupils, of whom 49 were Gypsy. The size of the sample group was determined, besides the above-described criteria, by the fact that the goal was not to deduce relations of statistical validity when performing the micro-sociological analysis and processing the answers to the questions, but to give an explanatory reasoning, with the acceptance of the fact that the validity of the explanations is restricted.

Hypotheses

Gypsy pupils, owing to their disadvantageous social situation and lack of roles, become socially insecure. As a result, their aspiration to be accepted reinforces their desire to assimilate to others so much that the content of their self-image will reflect the norms of conformity to others. That is why there will be no significant differences

in terms of self-categorization and self-characterization either between the Gypsy pupils of the sub-samples or between the Gypsy and non-Gypsy pupils.

Lack of roles of Gypsy pupils and the fact that the group does not convey behaviour models and does not accept personal qualities they accept in themselves will result in lack of a well-defined self-image and of emphasis on individuality.

Social insecurity may imply the development of distrustful attitude towards others, and their self-evaluation will concentrate on the alteration of the views other people hold of them. They will approve of the statement that "people only pretend that they care about others", and their self-evaluation will feature the attitude "others' evaluation does not matter when it comes to people's self-esteem".

In groups with weak cohesion and an unfavourable social atmosphere, social insecurity will result in the narrow range of pupils' identity and the use of many categories in their self-categorization.

In a social field divided by discrimination, Gypsy pupils are forced to apply a behaviour strategy in which self-evaluation is ambivalent. They do not want to identify themselves with the image that is developed pursuant to social cognition, which is why they rather not characterize themselves and not give account or examine their real self. As a result, they will tend to have only a desired self-image.

Contouring a self-image that complies with group norms postulates that the pupils wish to build up their future in conformity to the world's norms, and their future prospects will be stereotyped.

Findings of the research

Based on the survey, the social relations affecting the pupils' self-image are as follows:

The social position of Gypsy pupils features their being rejected, which is manifested in their peripheral situation; within the social field, they become partially or entirely separated. Their proportion in the classes did not influence this situation. They are unable to emerge from this social field and gain significance even if their proportion within the class is high. Obviously, the only exception is the Ny/8 sub-sample, where the entire class is made up of Gypsy pupils. The lack of roles indicates that they are inaptitude to perform community tasks.

Their self-evaluation and self-definition, which are based on their social relations, is built upon negative experiences. This is added to by the fact that they are not popular among the teachers either, which is why they do not receive either social or official recognition. Lack of social recognition is regenerated in their communication with their fellows and teachers. An explicit reason for their being socially rejected is either their being different or their norm-defiant behaviour. Their being different and the fact that they are considered to have a norm-defiant behaviour made their attitude towards their ethnic identity tense, because they are assigned an identity category that does not generate positive emotions in them. None of the Gypsy pupils indicated his belonging to an ethnic group within the range of identity.

Their social experiences are reflected in their self-definition, which is based on self-categorization and self-characterization, by that they over-emphasize their social competence. They deem themselves friendly, reliable, understanding, helpful and

generous. This is likely to be the result of, besides the self-reinforcing functions, their age. This assumption is justified by the fact that non-Gypsy pupils defined themselves on the basis of the same categories, albeit with less emphasis.

Their desire to be officially recognized on the basis of their academic performance is clearly manifested in their desired self. They would like to be clever, diligent, and obedient. These qualities are added to by courage in the case of boys, and beauty in the case of girls.

It can be said that the Gypsy pupils' self-definition reflects their identity with the non-Gypsy pupils. The findings of the survey do not confirm, which is why it remains only an assumption, that the unemphatic individuality built on identities reflects his aspiration to be accepted.

Their negative social experiences as well as their academic failures made their relation to themselves conflicting, which is manifested in their self-characterization. The weighed mean values of the results of the attitude scale suggest that Gypsy pupils are more insecure in both their self-evaluation and their evaluation of others than non-Gypsy pupils. They want to render their self-evaluation independent of others' opinions, but, at the same time, they think it is terrible if someone is being told bad things about.

On the strength of the findings of the survey, the characteristics of Gypsy pupils' model imitation can be summarized as follows: Their identity with the model of a successful and popular pupil is inhibited, as they do not have direct relationships with any such pupils. The direct behaviour-regulating role of these pupils therefore cannot have an impact on Gypsy pupils.

They have positive images of their parents, and they agree with their parents' concepts of values and expectations. It has to be noted, however, that form-masters hold a highly stereotyped image of Gypsy parents, which they think is the consequence of inadequate communication.

In plans concerning both the near and the remote future and in the values reflected by the pupils, there are identical features between Gypsy and non-Gypsy pupils. Their future prospects concentrate on happiness, for which they think work, wealth and family are necessary. This can be interpreted as an aspiration for successful social integration.

Consequences

Owing to the size of the examined group, no general consequences can be drawn, but certain statements need to be made. These may help raise awareness in teacher training.

- The most important thing is that various strategies that facilitate efficient learning have to be introduced. The existing catching-up activities did not improve the efficiency of learning and did not promote the integration of Gypsy pupils. Projects that reinforce motivation for performance and allow for a larger-scale evaluation should also be launched.
- Opportunities should be provided to both Gypsy and non-Gypsy pupils for the acceptance of differences, and it should be emphasized that these differences are unique features of the individuals. This is necessary because over-emphasizing the

differences between the groups' cultural features will lead to an ethno-centric educational policy, and, consequently, to segregated practices in education.

- The strengthening and extension of the relationships between the Gypsy parents and the school is indispensable to the improvement of the society's willingness to integrate Gypsies. A project-oriented approach serves, among others, this purpose. Through the extension of the relationships, the problems of Gypsies can be addressed in a more integrated way, and an opportunity can be provided for the better understanding of one another.