

# Multicultural Education in Transylvania

## Perspectives for the German Minority

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**R**OMANIA, ESPECIALLY Transylvania, is known to have been for centuries a multicultural space, where several cultures, languages and ethnic minorities lived together. Nowadays, about 10.5% of the Romanian population are minorities, the largest being the Hungarian and Romanians (9.18%). The highest density of minority population is found in Transylvania and Banat, two regions with a diverse historical background in terms ethnicity, culture and religion.

In this paper we will refer to the multicultural approach in the education of the German nationality, later referred to as a minority in Transylvania, in regard to their long history in this region, focusing especially on the development of the German teaching system during the nineteenth century.

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## Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education: A Multifaceted Approach

**F**OR A better understanding of the importance of multicultural education for the present day in the context of Transylvania and of the German minority, we will present the evolution and the development of two concepts: multiculturalism and multicultural education. There is no single and ubiquitous definitions for the concepts, as different authors formulated their own vision on them.

The term “multicultural” was introduced in the Oxford Dictionary as meaning “relating to or containing several cultural or ethnic groups within a society.” In regard to the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity as acknowledged in various documents, from the Declaration of Independence to the Declaration of Human Rights, a new concept was introduced—multicultural education—as a philosophical concept, with several definitions. Georgeta Rață<sup>1</sup> highlights the main explanations, starting with the meanings from the ’80s proposed by Margaret Alison Gibson,<sup>2</sup> for whom multicultural education is “a normal human experience.” For Sonia Nieto,<sup>3</sup> multicultural education is antiracist, basic, important for all students, pervasive, education for social justice, a process, and a critical pedagogy. Another definition has been proposed by Geneva Gay, who claims that multicultural education means “learning about, preparing for, and celebrating cultural diversity—or learning to be bicultural.”<sup>4</sup> For other authors, multicultural education is “a vehicle for people who have different value systems, customs, and communication styles to discover ways to respectfully and effectively share resources, talents and ideas.”<sup>5</sup> Multicultural education is a synonym for multiculturalism: “Educational intervention, defined as multiculturalism, multicultural education or multicultural pedagogy, works from the de facto situation of the presence of two or more cultures, and aims at the recognition of commonalities and differences.”<sup>6</sup> Maybe the most comprehensive definition of multicultural education is the one given by J. A. Banks,<sup>7</sup> for whom it is “a broad concept with several different and important dimensions . . . The dimensions are (1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) an equity pedagogy, and (5) an empowering school culture and social structure.” P. C. Gorski<sup>8</sup> focuses on the third dimension of Banks’s definition, claiming that multicultural education is “a progressive approach for transforming education that holistically critiques and responds to discriminatory policies and practices in education.”

## Multiculturalism in International Context

FROM A historical point of view, multicultural education has its roots in American society, back in the late 1800s to the early 1900s,<sup>9</sup> starting with the education of minorities. In the United States, the rapid development of multicultural education took place around the time of the civil rights movement. James A. Banks recognizes the importance of the historical development of the concept of multicultural education, in order to reflect multicultural issues and concerns.

The first perspective on multicultural education came in the context of the Early Ethnic Studies Movement, in the 1960s and the 1970s. Then, the curriculum in schools informed African Americans about their ancestry and culture as a movement against the discrimination that this minority had been facing. The first “black” school was founded in Boston in 1818. In the southern states the first schools were segregated by law. At the same time, the schools in which African American children learned provided very poor quality education in comparison to the schools attended by white Americans. The Ethnic Studies (ES) shaped by these facts empowered the African American to take control of their own education. Thus, they hired their own teachers and created their own curriculum, in order to support their culture. The negative aspect of this was that Whites and Blacks were more isolated from each other.

The next movement to arise was the Intergroup Education Movement (IEM), or the Intercultural Movement (IM). This movement is very similar to multicultural education as it is today, and it highlights interracial harmony and human relations. The momentous event in the field of Multicultural Education was the Supreme Court case *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education*, in 1954, which stated that it was unconstitutional for states to have laws that provided separate schools for black and white children.<sup>10</sup>

In 1968, in order to promote bilingual education programs, the Bilingual Education Act was passed. That decision led to the fact that schools had to provide education in languages that met the needs of the students.

Sleeter and Grant<sup>11</sup> describe five approaches to multicultural education:

- Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different—adapt education to student differences with the goal of helping these students to succeed with the mainstream (the case of white educators of black students, in desegregated schools, in the 1960s);
- Human Relations—provide love, respect, and more effective communication in order to bring people who differ closer together;
- Single Group Studies—changing the mainstream of America rather than trying to fit people into it (ethnic studies, women’s studies);

- Multicultural Education—links race, language, culture, gender, disability and, to lesser extent social class, working to make school celebrate human diversity and equal opportunity;

- Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist—encourage students to be activists for social justice and equal rights for all;

Another description of the conceptual and practical development of multicultural education was made by J. A. Banks,<sup>12</sup> who describes four approaches used today in schools:

- The Contributions Approach—means to add ethnic heroes into the curriculum using similar criteria to those used to select mainstream heroes. The mainstream curriculum remains unchanged in terms of structure, goals, and salient characteristics; it is the easiest to execute, but has the most risks, it is superficial and avoids issues like racism, poverty and oppression; moreover, it reinforces stereotypes and misconceptions;

- The Additive Approach—allows the teacher to add ethnic content into the curriculum, without restructuring it. This approach can be the first step in a curriculum reform with the aim to restructure the curriculum and to integrate it with ethnic content, perspectives, and frames of reference;

- The Transformation Approach—permits different perspectives into the curriculum, across all subjects;

- The Social Action Approach—includes all elements of the Transformative Approach and adds elements that require students to make decisions and take actions related to the problem, issue, topic studied in the learning unit.

Banks argues that all these approaches can be mixed into a very effective multicultural curriculum.

The benefits of a multicultural education have been revealed by several studies. Knowing that, it might be interesting to show how that concept was understood and implemented in a multicultural space like Transylvania, especially regarding the local German minority.

## Multiculturalism and the Transylvanian Context

**T**HE MULTICULTURALISM of Transylvania cannot be understood outside of the historical context, which contributed to a large extent to a better perception of this concept, as well as to multicultural education. It is fundamental to set, in this geographical space, a broad frame for the development of cultures, nations, strongly related to the Romanian state today. Therefore, an exploration of the relation between the historical context of the settlement of the

German minority in Transylvania and its contribution to multicultural education is the main objective of this paper.

The Transylvanian Saxons are a significant group of Germans living on the present-day territory of Romania, a community with a rich tradition.<sup>13</sup> In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, settlers from different German-speaking regions, such as the Moselle region, Flanders, and Luxembourg, were invited to Transylvania in order to colonize the presumably deserted territory newly conquered by the Hungarian Crown. Their migration to Eastern Europe is historically part of the so-called *deutsche Ostsiedlung*, the German colonization towards the east,<sup>14</sup> a quintessential process in view of the subsequent shaping of the German identity in the central and eastern parts of the European continent.<sup>15</sup> The first Hungarian king—King Saint Stephen—crowned in 1000, already warned his son: “A country that only has one language and one set of customs is weak and fragile.”<sup>16</sup> This can be viewed as an early statement in favor of an open society, with a multilingual and multicultural background.

In historical perspective, some aspects can be identified which link the development of the German community in Transylvania with the concept of multiculturalism:

- multiculturalism is linked to different groups of settlers, with their own language, dialect;
- the privileged position of the German Saxons due to their material possessions, religion, education, schools;
- the idea of the recognition of the importance of education, due to the first schools in every village (1340), in German communities;
- the importance of the Lutheran-Evangelical religion in the maintenance and provision of cultural events, of education.

Although the year 1699 marked the integration of Transylvania into the Habsburg Empire for quite a long period (until 1867 and 1918, respectively), we shall focus here only on the period between 1815 and 1918, analyzing the main historical developments of this interval: the 1848 Revolution, the status of nationalities in the Transylvanian society after the imperial Constitution of 1849, liberalism, the year 1867, when Transylvania found itself in the Austro-Hungarian Dual Empire, etc. In Habsburg Transylvania, church and religion played a very important role in public life as compared to the Western society which was undergoing secularization.

The circulation of students, books and ideas from the Western German states to Transylvania played a significant role in the creation of a multicultural environment in Transylvania.<sup>17</sup> The students from Germany, especially from Halle, brought to this territory especially the concept of Pietism, whose ideas would

take strong roots in Transylvania, especially in schools, becoming the main direction to follow. The directions set for the management of the schools were formulated in 1726 as follows: “Everywhere infinite evil follows from the corruption of schools; one must not only reveal this disease, but also think of a remedy, namely the provision of good teachers and decent salaries.”

Stephan Ludwig Roth made a statement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, saying that the Transylvanian Saxons should base their cultural and national identity on two pillars: Church and School. Drawing parallels between the educational (confessional) system in 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century Transylvania and the current (confessional) education system in the language of minorities provided a picture of the development of ethnic education and culture in different historical periods. Highlighting the role played by the state policy in the internal life of nationalities, of socio-professional and religious groups, identifying certain relationships among various ethnic groups and confessions, the fact that some ethnic groups belong to certain confessions, etc., may shed light on the issue of ethnic and confessional identity within the European context of Habsburg rule. There have been also periods when nationalist ideas were substituted by confessional ones.<sup>18</sup>

The Habsburg state of Maria Theresa (1740–1780) and Joseph II (1780–1790) put great emphasis on education and the creation of schools. A census conducted in 1763 by royal order shows that in Transylvania, in 24 schools located in major towns and boroughs, children were able to read, write and know the catechism, and some even knew Latin and music. In 236 grade schools, children knew how to read and had insights into the catechism, some knew how to write, few knew how to count and even fewer knew music. In particular, girls only learned how to read, in keeping with the belief that counting and writing should not be of interest to them (according to a circular from 1765).<sup>19</sup> The “Halle method” became dominant in the Transylvanian schools, but there were still complaints: the children did not go to school, they did not have enough books, the teachers’ pay was not enough and the school buildings were in a very bad state.

For the gymnasiums, however, the 18<sup>th</sup> century was one of progress, which proceeded together with the ecclesiastical organization. Due to the Counterreformation, the Protestant Church also had to reorganize itself. Thus, in 1753, the Consistory Law was passed, which would include all the Saxon consistories in Transylvania. The consistory took under its wing the gymnasiums, selecting the textbooks to be used, introduced the maturity exam as well as annual courses, and established a *unique Modus docendi*. The gymnasiums themselves adopted new regulations. This happened in Bistrița (Bistritz, Nösen, Beszterce) in 1755 and in Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben) in 1756–1758, according

to this model, and also in Mediaș (Mediasch, Medgyes) in 1763 and Sighișoara (Schäßburg, Segesvár) in 1772, where the influence from Halle is also observed. These regulations would be applied until 1834.<sup>20</sup>

By the end of the eighteenth century, the dissatisfaction with the schools had remained constant since the middle of the century, given the problem of insufficiently trained teachers. Therefore, in 1788 the Gymnasium of Sibiu began to organize the so-called preparation and training seminars for teachers in rural areas. Following the Diet of Cluj (Klausenburg, Kolozsvár) of 1791, the Church was again protected by the state, and it regained the right to erect church buildings, towers and schools.

A new stage in the development of schools began with Bishop Daniel Georg Neugeboren (1806–1822). The 1818 circular improved the school system: teachers' rights and privileges were regulated and the school curriculum was synchronized with those in the West, while teachers were no longer employed for one year, but for four. The new plan for gymnasiums stated the following:

*Immer wurde das Bessere und Geprüfte von Deutschlands Bildungsanstalten, teils in der Lehrmethode, teils in der Einföhrung neuer Lehrbücher, bei uns benutzt, welches . . . besonderen Modifizierungen unterlag und auch fernerhin diesen Umständen unterworfen bleiben muss. (We have always used the better and the tested [methods] of the German educational institutions, partly in the teaching methodology, partly in the introduction of new textbooks, which . . . was subject to special modifications and must also remain subject to these circumstances.)*

The 1826 plan followed the Prussian plan of 1816. An appendix to it described the teacher training seminars.

With the nineteenth century, in Transylvania the emphasis shifted to the renewal and restoration of old freedoms, without leaving aside the school in this process. However, the disorder in the province was still obvious. For the so-called *Volksschulen* it remained true what Stephan Ludwig Roth had said in 1821: *der krankhafte Zustand findet darin vorzüglichsten Krankheitsstoff, dass die Schullehrer als Seele der Schulen nicht das sind, was sie sein sollen* (the pathological state finds the most advantageous material in the disease that the school teachers, as the soul of the schools, are not what they should be). In the gymnasiums, the classes alternated once every two years, because there was no possibility to do one year at a time, the teachers changed annually, and their pay was low. The curriculum of the popular schools (1829) was not followed anywhere and the need for the training and preparation of teachers was increasingly pressing. The first 40 years of the nineteenth century meant a continuous struggle for assertion and an attempt was made to improve all aspects of daily life for the Saxons, this

being the view of Saxon historians about the period in question. In 1844, the Imperial and Royal Law Academy was opened in Sibiu, which had the duty to educate young people and make them able to defend the interests of the Saxon community.

In 1868, with the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian dualism,

*Church and school remained the main bastions which helped the Saxons to maintain their national identity under the conditions of the Magyar school legislation from the dualist period. As in Hungary there was a massive decline of the German language schools, only the Saxons benefited from a developed school system after 1900.*<sup>21</sup>

In 1868 the situation of the Saxon schools in Transylvania was as follows: five full gymnasiums in Sibiu, Braşov (Kronstadt, Brassó), Bistriţa, Sighişoara, and Mediaş, two lower gymnasiums in Reghinul Săsesc (Sächsisch-Regen, Szászregén) and Sebeş (Mühlbach, Szászsebes), a real high school in Sibiu, and two real lower schools in Braşov and Sighişoara. Elementary schools and girls' schools operated in the cities, and there were five more seminaries for the training and preparation of teachers attached to the five gymnasiums. Popular schools (*Volkschulen*) existed in all the villages of the Saxon community (260), with one or two teachers, depending on the size of the village.<sup>22</sup>

A short analysis of a Transylvanian personality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century offers the possibility to piece together some aspects regarding the multiculturalism of the Saxons. Karl Albrich Senior, the son of a lawyer and law professor at the Evangelical Gymnasium in Sibiu, was born on 1 February 1836 in Sibiu. After finishing his academic studies in Vienna, he taught briefly at Schemnitz, and from 1892 he held the position of director of the Evangelical Gymnasium in Sibiu. Karl Albrich Sr. is responsible for “the construction and importance of the royal school in Sibiu, which came to support the bourgeoisie.”<sup>23</sup> Karl Albrich's involvement was not limited to education in Sibiu, as he also held a leading position in the Saxon Consistory. His social involvement is evident in the establishment of the pension of the Evangelical Church. In fact, from 1890 he would participate together with Dr. Karl Wolff in the management of the Sibiu Bank (Hermannstädter Sparkassa). Another aspect of his personality is related to his research work, as he published articles on geometry and physics in the *Korespondenzblatt des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*. His son, Karl Albrich Jr., would lead the Evangelical Gymnasium in Sibiu. Karl Albrich Sr. is an eloquent example of the Saxon intellectual elite in Sibiu, as its multilateral development is also reflected in the actions they took not only in order to support the education



in Sibiu, but also improve the daily social life of ordinary Saxons in cities. Among other things, he was also the founder of the Widows' Support Association.

The analysis of archival documents brings us closer to the educational realities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As an example, the curriculum of the Evangelical Gymnasium of Sibiu shows the following situation: in the school year 1896–1897 a number of 14 teachers taught at the gymnasium, covering a wide range of subjects. From history, geography, the study of foreign languages, to mathematics, the subjects studied covered to a certain extent all curricular areas. In the same yearbook it is mentioned that the textbooks received by the school in 1896–1897 were donated by the Consistory of the Evangelical Church, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest, the Royal Academy of Sciences in Vienna, the Verein für siebenbürgische Landeskunde, or other cultural institutions in Jena, Kiel, Czernowitz, Braşov, or Cluj. During this period, textbooks and books were exchanged between the Evangelical Gymnasium in Sibiu and other gymnasiums in the country.

The yearbook also offers us a short presentation of the students of the gymnasium. Thus, except for the real and elementary school, the number of students who regularly attended the gymnasium is as follows: grades 1–8 in the gymnasium had 230 students, of which 155 of the Evangelical religion, 17 Unitarians, 8 Greek Catholics, 48 Greek Orientals, and 2 Israelites. As to their nationality, we find 166 Germans, 4 Hungarians, 58 Romanians, 2 of other nationalities, of which 2 died and 12 dropped out during the year.

The Evangelical Gymnasium in Sibiu had teachers and students from the Saxon intellectual elite, most of them educated and trained in the West. The gymnasium aimed to provide its students both with good quality textbooks and well-trained teachers. Most of the teachers mentioned in the table above published articles in the *Korespondenzblatt* or in the *Akademische Blätter*, thus participating in the development of culture in Sibiu. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Saxons' efforts to maintain a quality school were noticed, of course with the support of the Evangelical Church.

**M**ULTICULTURALISM, AS seen from the perspective of school education, was an important aspect of Transylvania's development. Moreover, the Transylvanian Saxons demonstrated through the measures taken over time that they can offer a multicultural education, based on European principles, received through the cultural transfer from the Western universities to the East. Moreover, the 19<sup>th</sup> century curricula demonstrate the appetite of teachers and professors for a multicultural education. The German elites in Transylvania struggled especially during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to adapt to the new realities and to preserve their rights to study and teach in the German

language. We would like to conclude with the remark made by the Saxon revolutionist Stephan Ludwig Roth, whereby the German nationality has tried so far to preserve its national and cultural identity, based on Church and School. □

## Notes

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## Abstract

### Multicultural Education in Transylvania: Perspectives for the German Minority

The paper presents the multicultural approach employed in the education of the German nationality, later referred to as a minority in Transylvania, with respect to their long history in this region, focusing especially on the development of the German teaching system since the nineteenth century. The Transylvanian Saxons demonstrated through the measures taken over time that they can offer a multicultural education, based on European principles, received through the cultural transfer from the Western universities to the East.

## Keywords

multiculturalism, Transylvanian Saxons, education, curriculum development, schools