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Cross-Cultural Competences and their shaping at Ronald S. Lauder Schools in Poland and other European countries. Selected Comparative Aspects.

Summary

The following dissertation concentrates on the chosen comparative aspects regarding the shaping of cross-cultural competences of the participants in the process of education, and the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and other European countries served as the field of research, which is of an international character. One of the investigated objects was the exploration and the clarification of various aspects aiding the shaping of cross-cultural competences of the participants (actors) of the education process at the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and other European countries. I define cross-cultural competences, from the most general perspective, as an interaction of individuals, groups, or organizations belonging to different cultures. The meaning of cultural differences is the key matter here, as well as the ability to detect, understand and include these differences in the process of communication. In the context of the approach towards a different culture, overcoming ethnocultural centrism, I perceive cross-cultural competences as the ability to broaden the interpretative spectrum of an individual in the interpersonal interaction process with the representatives of other cultures. Intercultural competence in communication with the representatives of different cultures is the exemplification of such behavioral traits as respect, positive attitude towards the world, empathy, taking into consideration the variety of cultural situations that a given person may find oneself in the process of communication with the representatives of other cultures. I also point at the fact that cross-cultural competences are directly related to the understanding of the image of the world of any person, including those possessing alternative skills, different values – shortly, cultural carriers.

The triangulation method was deployed to deepen the scope of the research, particularly to broaden the knowledge of the context of a phenomenon being researched. Furthermore, in order to obtain greater accuracy and reliability of the survey, I applied the semi-structured in-depth interview and the Thematic Content Analysis. Due to outlining

the common traits for the Lauder Schools (e.g. Jewish traditions, learning Hebrew), I was able to describe school life events, as well as the aims and main assumptions of education and upbringing curricula of the surveyed schools employing defining common goals (the nomothetic approach). The analysis of particular cases, however, helped define the differences within the school environment (the idiographic approach).

The dissertation comprises four chapters:

Chapter I. – outlines the theory underlying the dissertation (cross-cultural competences in chosen theoretical concepts; models, definitions, taxonomy; *cross-culturality* and cross-cultural competences in the education process).

Chapter II. – constitutes the methodology based on the author's research methods in the qualitative paradigm (the theoretical scope of the author's research methods and interpretation schemes as accepted analytical categories; methods, techniques and research tools used (the biographical method, the semi-structured interview, documentation analysis; research group, time and methodology of the survey).

Chapter III. – a monographic outline of the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and Europe (the portrayal of aims and tasks regarding the shaping of cross-cultural competences).

Chapter IV. – devoted to the analysis of the results of the author's research and the discussions thereof in the perspective of the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

Anselm Strauss' social worlds theory served as the theoretical backbone of the following dissertation. The theoretical perspective chosen by me enabled me to carry out an analysis of the organization schemes and functioning processes of the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and Europe. The qualitative survey falls into the assumptions of social constructivism. I perceive school society as a social microcosm where each element impacts the functioning of the whole system. In the research process, I was compiling my structure of understanding and getting to know the world of the Lauder Foundation Schools through interpreting and reflecting upon them. I was constructing the notions of the surveyed phenomena based on my own experience, as well as the survey participants' experience, with *a research awareness* that reality is subjective as it stems from the individual perspectives of the participants of the research.

The main research problem that was dealt with in this dissertation took the following shape: shaping cross-cultural competences in the process of education and upbringing at Ronald S. Lauder schools in Poland and Europe.

According to A.E. Clarke, it was assumed that the social world resembles an arena and it possesses its structural dimension. Lauder Schools in Poland and Europe are themselves arenas. Actors being students, parents and teachers, define the limits of their *subworlds* individually. Nevertheless, the element stabilizing the functioning of the social world of Lauder Schools is the common axiological perspective outlined in the statutes and curricula of the schools.

Furthermore, I distinguished the following detailed problems:

- How do students, teachers and parents (the actors of the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and other European countries) define and understand the notion of cross-cultural competences?
- In what way does the realization of the goals and cross-cultural curricula in didactic and upbringing processes of the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and other European countries influence the acquisition of cross-cultural competences?
- In what way does the celebration of festivals and traditional holidays, either secular and religious, by children, teachers and parents influence the acquisition of cross-cultural competences?
- Is *cross-culturality* included in the ideals and mission of the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and other European countries?
- In what way do children, teachers and parents acquire different cross-cultural competences?
- In what way do children, teachers and parents acquire cross-cultural communicative competences when it comes to learning foreign languages, such as English, Hebrew, and/or German, Spanish, French.
- In what way do children, teachers and parents make use of the acquired cross-cultural competences in their further education, work and daily life.

In conclusion, the placement of research inquiries within the context of social worlds enabled me to analyze the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland

and other European countries from the perspective of the defined constructs and social worlds, functioning within the Polish and European social reality. Complying with the approach of Adele E. Clarke, I consider the survey of the social world of Lauder Schools as identical to carrying out an analysis of the arenas thereof.

The goals of the research carried out by me were of an explorational character with descriptive-clarifying elements. Individual persons belonging to the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and other European countries were analyzed. As a participant and an observer of the didactic and educational process at the Lauder-Morash School in Warsaw, I had the opportunity to examine the natural environment of the school society. Therefore, not only was I able to observe communication, but I also was an active member of the process.

The examined group consisted of students, teachers and parents belonging to the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and Europe. The survey was carried out from January 2020 to April 2021. Only five out of eleven European Schools of the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation expressed their will to be a part of the survey. Due to the Sars-Cov-2 epidemic situation in Poland and Europe, the interviews were carried out in a remote form. While organizing the research, I deployed the non-random sample selection method, relying on the recruitment of the respondents by other respondents, the so-called snowball sampling method.

The study population comprised: female and male students – 19-31 years old; parents – 43-58 years old; teachers employed at the Schools of the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation in Poland and other European countries – 42-58 years old. The research material was being accumulated between January 2020 and February 2021. Interview questionnaires were sent to eleven schools in Poland and Europe – 290 forms altogether; 140 questionnaires were received by students, teachers and parents in Poland, and 150 questionnaires were received by students, teachers and parents in Europe.

I carried out a thematic analysis on the basis of the set of data gathered in the process of qualitative research. The analysis of the semi-structured interviews carried out among students, teachers and parents of the Lauder Schools in Europe served as the justification of the main conclusions. This approach enabled me to develop theories and notions collaterally with the process of collecting data, creating new knowledge and the interpretation thereof.

The dissertation employed the thematic identification on the overt semantic level – the analysis stems from written forms of expressions and/or oral research data (semi-structured interviews). The thematic analysis was a recurring process, and it was carried out under the stages adopted by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke.

The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and other European countries were portrayed as exceptional places, *an educational phenomenon*, where cross-cultural hermeneutics is effectuated in its humanistic dimension, favoring the open-minded attitude towards various cultures, the possibility of dialogue between them, and the understanding of these cultures. The following dissertation falls into the cross-cultural education discourse, and its place in the educational systems in Poland and Europe. The dissertation joins in the scientific discussion concerning the following research question-problems:

- In what way should we achieve the goals set by cross-cultural education?
- How should we shape the understanding and acceptance of cross-cultural differences?
- What didactic and educational actions should be taken in order to teach children how to get rid of various stereotypes and prejudices, for instance, religious or ethnic ones?
- What are the best means of implementing the attitude of tolerance and dialogue, and the acquisition of cross-cultural competences?

The research conducted by me shows that cross-cultural competences are shaped in the process of education and upbringing at the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and Europe, in compliance with the holistic conceptualization of the term. This approach, however, requires the acceptance of a different culture, its norms and values, and understanding the fact that each culture is exceptional and inimitable.

The following dissertation constitutes a scientific pondering on Jewish culture, history and education. To some extent, it is a tribute paid to the ones who, through education, nurture the heritage of the painful memory of the Shoah in Poland and Europe. The rabbis and the scholars of the Talmud highly valued children calling them *the anointed ones*. They concluded that life would be extinct but for the genius of the future generation. According to this exceptionally wise pedagogy, children are the future of the world in the spiritual and physical dimensions.

KEYWORDS: *cross-culturality*, cross-cultural competences, the Ronald Steven Lauder Foundation Schools in Poland and other European countries, Jewish education, cross-cultural education.