

# **Analysis of Inter-ethnic Relationship in Czech Primary Schools in Relation to the Educational Policy in the Czech Republic**

Abstract

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The research observes changes in the attitudes of Czech pupils of elementary schools to the ethnically different people that have occurred since the introduction of multi-cultural education as part of mandatory curricula at elementary schools. It examines both the current situation and changes in the context of school milieu, the group of friends, family and society (local and state-civic). It focuses on the comparison of declared positions and real behaviour among two groups of children of different age: the 11-12-year-old and 14-15-year-old pupils.

In terms of methodology, the research is based on contact hypothesis and on the assumption of influence of social and cultural environment on the acceptance of ethnically different people or distance from them.

Conclusions:

Children's attitudes to the ethnically different people, both children and adults, result from often contradictory influences provided by:

- Family (parents—through the differing formative influence of mother and father—, and through the wider family);
- Local society (depending on the size, ethnic structure of a locality and, in particular, immediate neighborhood – the „street“);
- School (the curricula, multi-ethnic or ethnically homogeneous milieu of a class and school, the class milieu);
- Group of friends (formed by the children both within and beyond the framework of a class);
- Media (television in particular);
- Influence of child personality (age—group of children of the same age, sex, preference of interests, authentic experience).

These influences shape the extent of children's positive ethnic approach or distance. Their acceptance by the child also depends on their sex (girls are more obliging) and age. Growing up of a child in inter-ethnic attitudes brings:

- Loss of dependence on the views and attitudes of parents to others;
- Preference to its own experience (and experience communicated by a group of friends, media);
- Preference to one's own views based on personal interests and approaches to life (such as interest in ethnically and culturally different people, which is part of one's image in the positions of Czech girls);
- Shift from the position of declared attitude to the position of real behavior (the will to establish contact and ability to meet ethnically different children).

The narrowing of ethnic distance is the basic result of the introduction of multi-ethnic curricula at Czech elementary schools. Openness toward others and positive approach to their presence in the Czech Republic leads to

- Higher acceptance of multi-ethnic school milieu by Czech children;
- Retreat from insistence on purely Czech school milieu;
- Loss of readiness to declare intolerant attitudes;
- Growing positive approach to the neighborhood with an ethnically different child in a school desk.

Cultivation of schoolchildren through multi-ethnic education in the course of the years 2003-2005 did not bring any major shift in the attitude of Czech children to their own ethnic identity. For groups of children under observation, ethnic origin remained a vital and natural characteristic in itself – both for Czech children and children from ethnic and immigrant families. The proportion of children from Romany families who declared their Romany ethnic origin has increased.

One can submit the following recommendations:

- To enhance multi-cultural discourse (both inside and outside school) in any positive form as it operates to the benefit of tolerance;
- To provide more opportunities for meetings with ethnically different children;
- The public should not be overly concerned over some excesses of intolerance among some children aged 11-12 years as there is self-correction when they grow up (even opposing the family's views).