

## Multiculturalism and Interculturality in Literature for Children and Youth

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### Abstract

In the domains of all humanities, arts, political sciences, religious studies, communication sciences, democracy studies, law, management and economics, etc., there are diverse studies of multiculturalism and interculturality, where the phenomena increasingly occupy a noticeably important position, becoming one of the most significant scientific topics, but it also the case in the everyday life in general. This is very important in the case of literature for children and youth, the more so because this literary genre is immediately directed to children and youth, with potential to shape their way of understanding life and the world in general at a very early developmental stages of a young person. In this context, literature for children and youth occupies an extremely significant place in literary and wider cultural studies, especially due to its continued presence and usage in educational practices. The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the importance of the role of studying multiculturalism and interculturality at all educational levels, especially in schools among children and youth, and the interpretation of literature in this context.

**Key words:** Multiculturalism, interculturality, literature, education.

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### Introduction

*"Interculturality has always been a part of the human condition, but in an era of accelerating globalization, questions of interculturality have become crucial." (Koegeler-Abdi & Parncutt, 2013, p. 1)*

In our time, the study of literature has increasingly turned to cultural and social questions, beyond the narrow traditional literary conceptions, and has become increasingly interested in various borderline cultural and social issues. Namely, in the sixties and seventies of the 20th century, with the development of post-structuralism and everything that has followed it to this day, cultural interest has increasingly entered literary studies. Similar phenomena occur in other humanities as well, like, for example, sociology or sociology of culture, which implies art, knowledge and entertainment (Klosovska, 2005), while culture has evolved into two dominant theoretical concepts: liberal-humanistic and post-structuralist (Kodrić, 2010; Spahić, 2016).

*"While the ideology of individualism is associated with mainly with traditional models of literary criticism, the poststructuralist vein in recent cultural work including new historicism, has also helped to obscure the importance of collectivities and social location." (Sinfield, 1998, p.812)*

In line with these hybrid changes, literary theories also become cultural too, because literary science is also being culturalized. In this way, the narrow, immanent interests of earlier approaches in literary studies are overcome, and the field of study of literature is broadened, taking into account, inter alia, how literature works in the wider context of culture, but also in the wider context of society, and what is the cultural and social relevance of literature and its role in cultural and social life. In this regard, particular attention is drawn to the phenomena of multiculturalism and interculturality, and to their great importance and role in the world in which we live.

Certainly interculturality and multiculturalism are different phenomena: Interculturality implies different relationships between individuals or groups situated between different cultures and opinions, relationships accompanied by the verbal and non-verbal interaction of those whom enter into these processes, in the complexity that these relationships entail (Pašić Kodrić, 2012), while multiculturalism is more about coexistence and a normative ideal that seeks to achieve equality and respect between cultures. In other words, "multi" relations are relations of multiplicity and coexistence, while "inter" relations are relations of interaction, permeation and interweaving with the emergence of new, "inter"

phenomena. Or, multiliterarity / multiculturalism implies multiplicity and coexistence of individual literatures / cultures, while interliterarity / interculturalism implies interaction, permeation and interweaving of individual literatures / cultures with the emergence of new literary / cultural phenomena (Kodrić, 2012; Kodrić, 2018a, Kodrić, 2018b, Kodrić, 2018c; Kodrić, 2019).

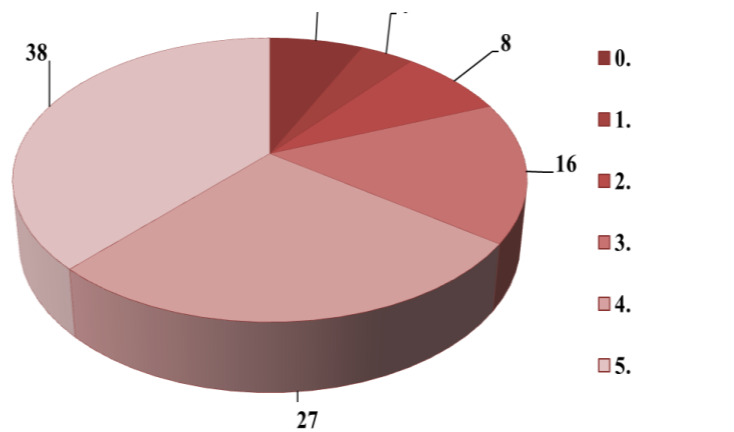
The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the fact that literature is a wonderful treasure trove for the study of multiculturalism and interculturalism, and that all teachers of literature at all educational levels should interpret literature in this way as well.

**Method and Findings**

How today's students think about the impact of literature on the development of multicultural and intercultural competences is best demonstrated by the research done on the basis of Kirkpatrick's evaluation model survey. Namely, along with Bloom's taxonomy, Kirkpatrick's model is one of the basic models for preparation, systematization, planning and assessment of knowledge at all educational levels. Today, it is most often used for the purpose of assessing already existing knowledge, enabling lecturers and other researchers to gain a better insight into the results of teaching process and to establish better basics for further education process. The purpose of using the Kirkpatrick's model in this survey is to examine students how much they have encountered in their previous education with the phenomena of interculturalism and multiculturalism, and what their knowledge is in this context.

The survey included the student population of the Faculty of Education at the University of Sarajevo (50 respondents) and also the student population of the International University of Sarajevo (50 respondents) in the Fall semester of the academic year 2016/2017. The key question in the survey was:

*Do you think that the result of learning about Difference and Different Cultures can make the world better, or did you feel that effect already on yourself?* The aforementioned question was asked precisely because it made it possible to understand whether students understand the basic task of understanding multiculturalism and interculturalism in their education so far, and this is, simply put, the creation of a better world in which we live.



**Comments on the results presented in Chart:** In terms of educational-teaching tasks, the results of Chart seem to be the most important part of the Kirkpatrick model survey, and it is even more interesting that given answers to this question, calculated by numbered responses, are very promising and positive. Namely, 7% of students rated this question with a 0 and 4% with a 1 (the lowest percentage of responses). Only 8% of students rated the significance of the question with 2, and 16% with the grade 3, 27% of students with a grade 4, and an impressive 38% (the highest percentage of responses) with a grade 5 - signified the importance of changing their own literary performance and learning outcomes on Difference and Different Cultures as an essential segment in the creation of their worldview. In this respect, this chart clearly shows that the study of multiculturalism and interculturalism in literature has to be taken more seriously because they are of enormous importance to the global world in which we live, and the students

themselves are aware of this. Also all these results should be a clear indicator for teachers in elementary and secondary schools that the wrongful ignorance of knowledge in multiculturalism and interculturality is a problem that should be addressed in terms of individual and collective entirely different teaching approaches to the given topic. Specifically, the results of this survey clearly show that teachers in primary and secondary schools must pay much more attention to the study of the phenomenon of interculturalism and multiculturalism.

## Results, Conclusions and Recommendations

In the domains of all humanities, arts, political sciences, religious studies, communication sciences, democracy studies, law, management and economics, etc., there are diverse studies of multiculturalism and interculturality, where the phenomena increasingly occupy a noticeably important position, becoming one of the most significant scientific topics, but it also the case in the everyday life in general. Although literature is fiction, it has very complex relation to reality, or the extraliterary world we live in, and that is why it can be understood as one of the best media for the study of interpersonal relations, including issues of multiculturalism or interculturalism too. This is very important in the case of literature for children, the more so because this literary genre is immediately directed to children, with potential to shape their way of understanding life and the world in general at a very early developmental stages of a young person. In this context, literature for children occupies an extremely significant place in literary and wider cultural studies, especially due to its continued presence and usage in educational practices. This issue, i.e. the issue of multiculturalism and interculturality in literature, particularly children's literature, is especially important in complex and heterogeneous societies like Bosnia-Herzegovina, but also in the global world we live in, the world in which issues of multiculturalism and interculturality have become one of its key problems and challenges that have to be coped with in many aspects, including the aforementioned one. Namely, literature in general, and particularly literature for children, can offer some solutions to the problems and challenges of multiculturalism and interculturality in the contemporary world, giving examples and models of making the world a better place to live in.

*"Recognizing of significant social diversity is a key feature of modern life and affirms our sense of belonging to various types of collectivity." (Atkinson et al, 2008, p. 127)*

In this context, there is also a cultural turn in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian literary studies and the need for a multicultural and intercultural study of literature in order to interpret complex Bosnian-Herzegovinian literary past. With this cultural approach, a more complete picture of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literary practices emerges, literary practices that are not isolated from other cultural and social practices, and the role of literature in life is more clearly positioned. This is especially important in reading literature for children and youth, because this literature doesn't have only the function of building a literary taste in children and young people, but also has pedagogical, educational, educational and ethical functions, which are particularly important and what are its most dominant functions along with the aesthetic function of literature.

In that sense, especially in complex societies such as Bosnian-Herzegovinian society, special importance belongs to the question of the role of literature, especially literature for children and youth in the construction and nurturing of multicultural and intercultural identity in children and young people, thus directly affecting future generations and promoting multiculturalism and interculturalism from a very early age as extremely positive values. And not only literary theory but also scientific disciplines such as psychology, pedagogy or methodology etc. have drawn attention to the impact of literature and language teaching on the participants in the educational process and its extreme importance in shaping the real world picture.

*"It is often said that literature is the best laboratory for studying human motives, emotions and character. At the same time, while reading some piece of literature, through its heroes and characters, we understand our own selves better." (Stojaković, 2000, p. 133)*

Namely, the situation of superficial and almost incidental treatment of the phenomenon of multiculturalism and interculturalism in literary theory, their poorly defined and insufficiently researched discourse within the framework of literature theory, was reflected in the teaching and general study of multiculturalism and interculturality within the educational process at all educational levels. In line with the idea of contemporary teaching and with regard to the educational but also the upbringing function of the school, the aim of this paper is to help students and teachers through at least a little more complete education on multiculturalism and interculturalism in schools, especially in terms of a more complete understanding of the nature and form of existence of literature. In this way, through greater knowledge of multiculturalism and interculturalism, in addition to general knowledge of literature, students and

lecturers would be more able to adopt an awareness of the nature of the Differences that surround them, as well as the processes of increasing migration in the world we witness every day, which are, unfortunately, accompanied by many conflicts, local and global cultural misunderstandings, prejudices, intolerances and wars. Just as Mark Twain put it nicely in his 1869 *The Innocents Abroad* travelogue (Twain, 1869), the cultural capital that is gained through travel (and today we can say also from the knowledge about multiculturalism and interculturality) is surely the “most beautiful lasting property” an individual can afford.

Therefore, teaching literature for children and youth in schools, in contexts of interpreting knowledge about the importance of studying the phenomena of multiculturalism and interculturality, would certainly prepare students in time for richer and more sophisticated engagements in the contemporary processes of intercultural communication and the modern world of Differences. This kind of literary studies would nurture and build their intercultural sensibility, which seems to be greatly lacking in the world around us today.

*“The literature class gives students the opportunity to establish a new relationship with themselves and with the world, builds on social, moral and aesthetic awareness, and to ideally and philosophically find himself, and to form a world view.” (Rosandić, 2005, p. 82)*

Literature for children and youth is an excellent instrument for immediate building and nurturing the aforementioned intercultural and other compatible competencies, as well as for a better understanding of literature and the mother tongue, which is also the task of schooling. In this respect, it is also necessary to emphasize individual questions that could be more comprehensively raised within the teaching process in the case of a larger and more complete study of multiculturalism and interculturalism in literature teaching, and these are just some of the possible suggestions:

- Learning about multiculturalism, interculturalism, Otherness and Foreignness through literary works for children from a very early school age – namely, all the famous fairy tales and fables for children abound in such motives, they just have to be viewed in this way too;

- Particular attention in literature for children and youth should be paid to the motifs and symbols of trips, sorrow for the homeland, the beauty of discovering something new and different, travellers, tourists and travel in general – through these motives and symbols, pupils can most easily learn, understand and nurture the concepts of intercultural communication, intercultural dialogue and intercultural sensibility and with all this knowledge they can acquire the intercultural competences that should be the dominant trait of every human being.

- The relation between fiction and fact in literature – this concept is important especially because of intercultural insensitivity in some works in literature for children and youth;

- Understanding the autonomy of a literary work, story and storytelling;

- Drawing attention to the entirety of writers' literary work, including travel writing / travelogue, which is often the best genre in literature for the study of multiculturalism and interculturalism, the more so because travel literature is a significant and most effective medium for global circulation of (trans)cultural information (Holland & Graham, 2003);

- The phenomenon of acceptance of literature in society and the way it is valued in view of its (un)ethical values – in this context, the beauty of promoting multiculturalism and interculturalism should certainly be emphasized more often;

- Learning about syncretism, intertextuality and intermediality in literature for children and youth – music, movies, etc. are often excellent sources of promoting interculturalism and multiculturalism and should be used more in literature classes in general;

- Correlation of knowledge of multiculturalism and interculturalism in literature with other subjects and fields (geography, history, music etc.);

This approach to teaching literature for children and youth will surely build and nurture intercultural identity in students, but it will also nurture intercultural lifelong learning in lecturers too because education is always a two-way process involving both students and lecturers – in a way of creating and nurturing an intercultural identity (Kim, 1991) that involves:

- Acceptance of existing and new cultural elements;

- Enriching the width and depth of sight;

- Greater self-understanding, self-acceptance and confidence;

- Increased openness and flexibility;

- Increased creativity to face new challenges.

The contribution of this paper is precisely in the models offered for the study of multiculturalism and interculturalism in literature, as well as the attention that students in Bosnia and Herzegovina have not

acquired sufficient knowledge in these fields until their university education. This means that at lower educational levels in the future, students must have much more education in this regard.

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