

## Human Prejudices: The Strategies for Reducing them in the Context of the Multicultural School



### Psychology

**Keywords:** Multiculturalism; prejudices and stereotypes; social identity; strategies for reducing prejudice; cognitive theory; equal pedagogy.

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### Abstract

Ordinary people, very frequently, build their opinions about other people based on information which they do not have or information which has little real ground. An example of this tendency are the human prejudices – convictions which we are always considered to be accurate, without approaching them in a critical manner and as such we receive them as finished products, in the way they have been served to us by the education, the family, the media, culture, etc.

In this paper the subject of analysis are the prejudices and the strategies for reducing them with a special attention to the population of children and young people in the context of the multicultural school. In the introductory part we unveil the nature of prejudices through the prism of the theoretical views of the social psychology: a) The theory of behavior modeling; b) The theory of social identity; and c) The cognitive theory. Based on these views we place an emphasis on the limiting influence of the negative prejudices on the logical interpretation of the events and the people, as a potential source for multiethnic conflicts among the young.

In accordance with the theoretical concepts, we finalize the contents of the paper, emphasizing the basic strategies for dealing with, i.e. reducing the prejudices in the students, with a special attention to: a) Intensifying the cooperation among the ones who are the subject of prejudices and the ones who have prejudices; b) Creating conditions for integrated education; c) Amendments of the educational and other institutional policies which render legitimate the division among the students; d) Providing information about the subjects of stereotypes as the most direct way of changing patterns through education; e) Creating conditions for equal pedagogy and f) Building a school – open culture towards diversity.

### Introduction

The consequences of the last two world wars raised the awareness of the international community for the need of promotion of battle against discrimination of all kinds, in the function of consolidation of the human rights. In recent years, all around the world on a global and local level, in and out of the institutions, strategies are being implemented to increase the collaboration among people with the primary goal to decrease the intolerance and prejudices.

The existence of hot spots in different regions as a result of conflicts of religious, ethnic and racial character represents a serious warning for civilization, especially at a time when we discuss the growth of the population on Earth, and the crisis resulting from the decrease of the natural resources.

In the communication among people, many times, certain unpleasant aspects of this behavior are being manifested. Primarily, we have in mind the cases when the feelings and behaviors towards the others are negative, and in fact, these are the prejudices.

It is a fact that the existence of prejudices towards other groups does not only render difficult the life of the groups towards which they are addressed, but this is also a rigid basis which encourages and leads towards conflicts among people.

### **1. The nature of the prejudices**

According to Myers (2003), the prejudice is “a negative judgment of a group and its individual members. The prejudice leads us against other individuals only because we identify them with a particular group” (p. 305). This means, that we are discussing assessments which are primarily based on the whole group (membership), rather than the one of the individual members of the group (Feldman, 1997).

The very nature of prejudices is treated from different points of view, as separated parts of the spectrum of human behavior. We consider that the highlighting of some important characteristics of the prejudices contributes to their deeper understanding, and all this is in the function of a better description and the reduction of their effect. Hence, in this paper, we will discuss their nature from a theoretical point of view, and we will pay special attention to the strategies for their reduction, especially the ethnic ones which represent a constant challenge to peace.

### **2. Theoretical views**

Regardless if they are racial, religious, gender etc., prejudices as negative attitudes against the ones who are unlike us, mainly in their background have a personal (feelings, attitudes, experience and behavior) and social context.

#### **2.1 Prejudices as a result of the imitation of models**

A great number of prejudices are transferred to children by their parents, relatives, peers, the media etc. The small children have no national or racial prejudices (Allport, 1961). Children build their own attitudes and opinions, and also prejudices by imitating the adults (the models). People are not born with prejudices against others. One way for their forming is when the children imitate their parents and other close adults (Zinberg, 1976; Kryzanowski, & Stewin, 1985).

Consequently, the parents, teachers and the other adults who manifest prejudices against the others different from them, are not aware of the indoctrination of their children. The teaching of prejudices through the model of the adults starts from the earliest years, around the third year (Katz, according to Feldman, 1997).

## 2.2 Theory of social identity

According to this theory, the group is being used as a source for pride and self-appraisal (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1987). The consciousness for the personal “I” consists of the personal “I” and the social identity. Our identity is built by categorizing others, identifying with them – “our people” and comparing with them – “the other people”, during which we root for our group. Hence, it is clear why people can easily fall for the prejudices of others.

## 2.3 Cognitive point of view

In the relations among people of different cultures, races and other groups, prejudices often eclipse the rational judgment on the account of mutual intolerance and aggression. According to the cognitive theories, the prejudices (and stereotypes) exist not only as the result of the social conditions, but occur because of the processes of thinking i.e. their natural tendency for categorization of the occurrences with the goal to simplify them.

The stereotypes are the cognitive platform of prejudices, which means general conclusions without arguments for the other groups, i.e. their members. Encouraged by the tendency to justify the stereotypes, especially in situations when the ego of the individual is endangered by internal dilemmas and conflicts we resort to prejudices as defensive mechanisms.

## 3. Managing prejudices

People find it difficult to free themselves from the prejudices, it is much like breaking a habit. Although we try to free ourselves from the bad thoughts about other people, they defy our intentions (Devain, etc., according to Myers, 3003). Subsequently it is not unusual for one to be tempted by prejudices, yet one should be able to control them in order not to fall hostage to such ideas, yet to compensate them with positive behavior in the future. Therefore, the question is, can we reduce prejudices?

The very nature of prejudices is quite complex, as we have already emphasized in the above text, as a result of a great number of factors which sometimes are not related to their influence. Nevertheless several strategies are recommended as a way to reduce prejudices (Banks, 1993, 1995; Slavin, 2006.; Cook, 1984, Brewer and Miller, 1984):

- a) Intensifying the cooperation among the ones who are the subject of prejudices and the ones who have prejudices;
- b) Creating conditions for integrated education;
- c) Amendments of the educational and other institutional policies which render legitimate the division among the students;

- d) Providing information about the subjects of stereotypes as the most direct way of changing patterns through education, and
- e) Building a school – open culture towards the diversities.

### Conclusion

In order to reduce prejudices it is absolutely necessary to intensify the cooperation between the people who are the subject of prejudices and the people who have prejudices. In the course of doing this, situations of equality and direction towards the fulfillment of the shared goal should be created in this cooperation. Conditions should be created in the school environment not only for competition but also for cooperation among the students.

It is evident that prejudices do not have deep roots in the personality of the human being, therefore they can be reduced by changing the time and the norms of a society, in terms of their managing.

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