SCHNEIDER`S PSYCHOLOGY OF STEREOTYPING AS A HELPING TOOL IN FULFILLING SOME OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THE FRAMEWORK EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the paper is to introduce the crucial work of the distinguished American psychologist D. J. Schneider - Psychology of Stereotyping. The reason is that the awareness of stereotypes and their sources is an important part of teachers' knowledge in the contemporary society. In the Czech Republic, the relatively newly introduced principal curricular document the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education (FEP BE) claims that it is not necessary for the learners to gain only knowledge of particular subjects but also so called key competencies which help the learners develop their personalities through so called cross curricular subjects. English language teaching is an ideal means to introduce especially multicultural education. Being a global language, it enables the learners to communicate with other people and other cultures and thus understand their otherness and at the same time combat stereotypes.

The paper focuses in detail on the objectives related to the notion of stereotypes and their overcoming, along with the application of results of Schneider`s research in modern education, mainly in English language teaching.

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2. SELECTED OBJECTIVES OF THE FRAMEWORK EDUCATION PROGRAMME FOR BASIC EDUCATION

To be able to approach the issue of stereotypes it would be useful to introduce some of the objectives of the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education, the most important curricular document of recent years in the Czech Republic. We can start with the concept of basic education at stage 2, which corresponds to middle school level (pupils aged 11-15): 'Basic education at Stage 2 helps pupils to acquire knowledge, skills and habits that will enable them to study independently and create such values and attitudes as lead to prudent and cultivated behaviour, to responsible decision–making and to respect for the rights and obligations of citizens of both their country and the European Union' (FEP BE 2005:10). We can go on with two, particularly chosen, objectives of basic education: 'Induce in pupils the urge to express positive feelings and emotions in their behaviour, ways of acting and when experiencing important situations in their lives; develop in them sensitivity and responsiveness towards other people, the environment and nature' (FEP BE 2005:11). 'Guide pupils to tolerance and consideration for other people, to respect their culture and spiritual values, teach pupils to live together with others' (FEP BE 2005:11).The same or very similar goals are also required for Key Competencies that should be developed in all subjects: 1. Social and personal competencies – 'By the end of his or her basic education the pupil contributes to the creation of a friendly atmosphere in the team; contributes to a strengthening of interpersonal relations based on his or her consideration for others and respect for others; offers help or asks for help when needed' (FEP BE 2005:14). 2. Civil competencies – 'By the end of his or her basic education, the pupil respects the beliefs of others; has respect for personal values of others; is able to empathize; opposes oppression and any rude behaviour; is aware of his or her obligation to stand up against any physical or psychological violence' (FEP BE 2005:14).

As we can see, the objectives of basic education are rather complex than being divided into sections of particular school subjects and seen isolated. Teaching one subject requires knowledge and skills of other subjects to a certain level. The FEP BE does not see knowledge and skills separated into particular subjects but as a complex (never final) product of even more complex process of learning and acquisition identical to Schneider`s interpretation of the term "cognition". The "cognition" reflecting up-to-date needs of the society and modern school education. Naturally, the only reason for the new approach to education is not the fact that it is a must for teachers because it is a part of

the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education, but because it reflects the real character of cognition itself. Therefore, the ongoing curricular reform is so important as reflecting the character of learning more naturally, introducing cross curricular subjects. 'Cross–curricular subjects in the FEP BE are subjects related to contemporary present-day issues and represent an important and inseparable part of basic education. They represent an important formative element of basic education, offering pupils the opportunity for individual engagement and teamwork and promote their personal development, primarily as concerns attitudes and values' (FEP BE 2005:91). The following cross-curricular subjects have been defined for basic education:

- •Personal and Social Education
- •Democratic Citizenship
- •Thinking within European and Global Context
- •Multicultural Education
- •Environmental Education
- •Media Education
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3. RELATED TERMS

Considering what has been said so far about most of the concept and objectives of basic education, a certain number of important terms which repeat several times emerge: differences, diversity, attitudes, prejudices, empathy, justice, stereotypes, solidarity. These terms are of a completely different or partially different meaning, but are closely connected to the notion (in)tolerance. The word itself appears in FEP BE more often than any other from the mentioned earlier. The word is not only semantically related to the words but mainly it is a general term important for fulfilling most of the FEP BE objectives mentioned in the opening part of the paper.

Having started speaking about tolerance or intolerance, it seems to be crucial to define the term. There can be found a great number of definitions as the word can be grabbed from several points of view and most of them are relevant to teaching: psychological, pedagogical, sociological, political, etc. But for us a more general definition would be sufficient because of a rather complex character of teaching and learning, as stated before. Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary reads: 'Intolerance is unwillingness to let other people act in a different way or hold different opinions from you; used showing disapproval' (CCELD 1993:766). Now it is time to advance to what causes intolerance or what is intolerance based on. Modern psychologists claim that intolerance is based mostly on two factors: 1. Ignorance and the fear of something unknown or different 2. Accepting (very often inaccurate) stereotypes.
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4. HOW TO DEFINE STEREOTYPES?

With the notion of stereotypes we slowly advance to the main issue of this paper. The Framework Education Programme for Basic Education directly deals with stereotypes in the part of the cross-curricular subject of Thinking within European and Global Contexts (FEP BE 2005:98): In the area of attitudes and values, the cross-curricular subject:

- •helps to overcome stereotypes and prejudices
- •enriches pupil`s understanding of themselves by introducing them to their open future, including their expanded range of choice in Europe and the world
- •cultivates an understanding of Europe as their broader home and towards the world as the global environment
- •forms a positive attitude towards differences and cultural diversity
- •forms a positive attitude towards traditional European values
- •provides role models for the proper conduct of European citizens and a sense of responsibility
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Again, if we want to avoid stereotypes, it seems to be crucial to define what the stereotype is and make students aware of them in ELT. David J. Schneider, professor of Psychology and Cognitive Sciences, goes back to the origin of the word stereotype: 'The word ''stereotype'' itself comes from the conjunction of two Greek words: stereo, meaning ''solid,'' and typos, meaning ''the mark of a bow,'' or more generally ''model.'' Stereotypes thus ought to refer to solid models, and indeed the initial using of the term in English referred to a metal plate used to print pages (Schneider 2004:8). Schneider is aware of the difficulty and ambiguity in defining what stereotypes are. Before offering his

own definition, he reviews several earlier definitions, and then discusses some of the features highlighted by presented definitions. For the reader to be able to get some idea of the range of definitions, Schneider (2004:16) lists several classic ones:

'a fixed impression which conforms very little to the facts it pretends to represent and results from our defining first and observing second' (Katz and Braly, 1935:171).

'A stereotype is a stimulus which arouses standardized preconceptions which are influential in determining one`s response to the stimulus' (Edwards,1940, 357:358).

'Whether favourable or unfavourable, a stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category' (Allport, 1954:187).

'a collection of traits-names upon which a large percentage of people agree as appropriate for describing some class of individuals' (Vinacke, 1957:230).

'Stereotyping has three characteristics: the categorization of persons, a consensus on attributed traits, and a discrepancy between attributed traits and actual traits' (Secord and Backman, 1964:66).

'a belief that is simple, inadequately grounded, or at least partially inaccurate, and held with considerable assurance by many people' (Harding et al., 1969:4).

'An ethnic stereotype is a generalization made about an ethnic group concerning a trait attribution, which is considered to be unjustified by an observer' (Brigham, 1971:29).

'A stereotype refers to those folk beliefs about the attributes characterizing a social category on which there is substantial agreement' (Mackie, 1973:435).

'A structured set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people' (Ashmore and Del Boca, 1979:222).

' a collection of associations that link a target group to a set of descriptive characteristics' (Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986:81).

'highly organized social categories that have properties of cognitive schemata' (Andersen, Klatzky and Murray, 1990:192).

'a positive or negative set of beliefs held by an individual about the characteristics of a group of people. It varies in its accuracy, the extent to which it captures the degree to which the stereotyped group members possess these traits, and the extent to which the set of beliefs is shared by others' (Jones, 1997:170).

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As may be seen from the chronological list, the definitions of stereotypes have changed in relation to time. It is also apparent that there is no real consensus on what stereotypes are. Nevertheless, after reading the list we can get an idea of what stereotypes are generalizing and trace some common features of the definitions. But rather than common features the term essential qualities of stereotypes seems to be more accurate. And what are the essential qualities of stereotypes? 'The most basic definition I can offer, the one with the fewest constraining assumptions, is that stereotypes are qualities perceived to be associated with particular groups or categories of people. This definition captures at least the essential qualities that stereotypes must have, in the sense that everyone would agree on this much. Note that the definition does not place limitations on what these features might be; they could be traits, expected behaviours, physical features, roles, attitudes, beliefs, or almost any other qualities. It is not restrictive about types of categories that might be considered as gist for the stereotype mill' (Schneider 2004:25).

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5. THE CONTENT OF STEREOTYPES

This definition is of a great importance for us, teachers. It is obvious that the range of stereotypes as a source of intolerance is very wide and sometimes the content of stereotypes is surprisingly unexpected. There are generally known categories of stereotypes concerning: race, sex, religion, culture, social status etc. According to the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education pupils should 'recognize intolerant, racist, xenophobic and extremist behaviour in people and take an active stance against all forms of human intolerance' (FEP BE 2005:47). Yet, what are the other forms (categories of stereotypes) besides the ones stated above? Schneider lists other categories of which we might not be aware: education, health, socioeconomic status, occupation, age, physical features (uncontrollable features such as body type, height, facial features; controllable features such

as hair, cosmetics and clothes, eyeglasses); language (names, nicknames, regional and ethnic accents, gender-related styles); possessions and acquisitions (what we choose to buy and display).
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6. STEREOTYPES ARE NOT ALWAYS BAD BUT...

To sum up what has been said in the paper and can be read in the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education it might seem that stereotypes are not desirable and are always negative. But is it so straight-lined?

'Stereotypes are not always negative. The belief that Asian students are good at maths is just as much a stereotype as the belief that fat people are lazy. Of course we may be more concerned about the latter, negative generalization, and we`d probably be more inclined to denounce it by calling it a stereotype. So up to a point, stereotypes share the same advantages and disadvantages as other generalizations' (Schneider 2004:563).

Schneider states that stereotypes are simply generalizations about groups of people, and are similar to generalizations about any other entities. He emphasizes that we have them because they are useful. Especially, the last sentence might give rise to disagreement. Why are they useful? From the psychological point of view they are really useful. They are a form of generalization, a form of cognition. They help us to survive. They help students survive in the target language community, especially at the beginning stages of their acculturation. 'We all use them all the time. To deny the use of generalization about people would result in intellectual and social chaos' (Schneider 2004:563). Yet at the same time it is necessary to agree with Schneider that stereotypes are often negative, untrue, and unfair.

'Stereotypes are bad because they emphasize the negative rather than the positive features of the group. Our interest in stereotypes obviously is fueled by the negative features that seem to support prejudice and can do real damage to members of stereotyped groups (Schneider 2004:19).

Other problems are that stereotypes are very often based on faulty reasoning, relatively little direct experience and are usually held by highly prejudiced individuals. Moreover, 'stereotypes, like all generalizations, resist change' (Schneider 2004:563). It means that they were created under certain circumstances which might not be valid any more (if they ever were at all) although the stereotypes are still considered to be true. From the pedagogical point of view stereotypes are condemnable mainly as a source of intolerance:

'[S]tudying stereotypes and stereotyping without considering their relations to prejudice and discrimination is sterile and incomplete. Furthermore, it will simply not do to assume that stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination form a neatly wrapped package' (Schneider 2004:266).

Therefore, it is so important to pay much attention to Schneider`s Psychology of Stereotyping because stereotypes are a fertile source of intolerance.
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7. SOURCES OF STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes are a source of intolerance and its related problems, but what is a source of stereotypes? 'In obvious ways, stereotypes are direct reflections of our experiences. Many (perhaps most) of our important stereotypes are based on at least some contact, sometimes indirect, with relevant groups' (Schneider 2004:329).

Now we can ask a question what indirect and what direct contact is. The direct contact is based on our own hardly transferable experience with a certain group of people or individuals of a particular race, age, religion, appearance etc. It could be seen as a form of individual generalization, a form of cognition, although either accurate or inaccurate. Knowing the foreign language will enable learners to get into the direct contact and combat stereotypes. The indirect contact is based on the absence of such individual and non-transferable experience. It is a kind of cultural tuition: 'Parent`s or teacher`s explicitly telling children what to believe about members of specific groups is certainly the prototypic means of cultural transmission. Direct influences on processing (how to think) are also fairly commonplace. For example, religious communities tend to enforce particular ways of thinking about misdeeds; parents may remind their children that "those people" categorically are not to be trusted or have deviant values (or, conversely, that we should always try to think of people as individuals); and schools emphasize all manner of lessons about the importance of hard work in the classroom and on the playing fields, which can dramatically affect the ways we think about others (Schneider 2004:338). Paradoxically, the indirect experience based on tuition has direct effects. We

are told what to think, without any given opportunity to form our own views on given issues. However, the problem is more complicated. If stereotypes were so easily comprehensible, it would be sufficient to avoid only the ones based on our indirect contact and to accept, without hesitation and to our advance, the ones based on our direct contact as true facts resulting from our accurate generalization. Two essential questions arise: 1. Is it possible to make a clear distinction between stereotypes formed from direct or indirect contact? 2. Is our ability of generalizing accurate? The answer to the latter one is, of course, no. This ability is influenced by so many factors which are too individual and are not exactly definable and measurable. As the answer to the first question, Schneider says:

'By contrast, all or nearly all of our important stereotypes are based on mixture of what we have been taught and seen. We cannot separate cultural and experiential bases of our stereotypes -.not because we lack the right modes of analyses or sophisticated computer programs, but rather because the two are integrally bound together. Trying to partial culture out of experience makes no more sense than trying to talk about a river without discussing its geography. Experiences are themselves products of culture' (Schneider 2004:338).

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8. LANGUAGE AND ITS ROLE

At the beginning of another part of the paper it is desirable to present other goals from the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education related to the topic of the paper as we did at the beginning of the paper in order to try to fulfil them. In section 'Cross-curricular subjects' we can read:

'The cross-curricular subject`s thematic areas cover multiple education areas and allow for the integration of content from the educational fields. This contributes to the pupil`s comprehensive education and positively influences the formation and development of their key competencies. Pupils are thus given the opportunity to form an integral view on a given issue and to apply a broad spectrum of their skills' (FEP BE 2005:91).

'In the area of attitudes and values, the cross-curricular subject offers pupils information which helps them to form the attitudes of tolerance and respect towards different sociocultural groups, to consider the cultural background of members of other sociocultural groups and to recognize their legitimacy' (FEP BE 2005:100).

In the section Multicultural Education is emphasized:

'Multicultural Education deeply affects interpersonal relationship at school, including teacher-pupil relations and relations among pupils, between the school and the family and between the school and the local community. As an environment which brings together pupils from various social and cultural backgrounds, the school should ensure an atmosphere in which all will feel equal, in which minority pupils are successful in a majority environment and in which majority pupils learn about their minority classmates` culture. In this way, Multicultural Education contributes to mutual understanding between both groups, tolerance, and the elimination of animosity and prejudices towards the "unknown" ' (FEP BE 2005:99).

And again, we must ask how these goals can be achieved. The most obvious answer is that language is the tool. Language as a tool of daily verbal communication and a key instrument in various life situations is both a tool and a source of understanding.

'In Language, pupils acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to learn the standard form of the Czech language, and learn to recognise and identify its forms. The language component guides pupils towards accurate and logical thinking, which is a prerequisite for expressing oneself clearly, comprehensibly and in a well-structured manner' (FEP BE 2005:18).

The importance of the mother tongue is indisputable. 'The Czech language is an irreplaceable tool of learning, processing information and presenting one`s attitudes and opinions, but also plays an important instructional role in learning other languages' (FEP BE 2005:97). Language is a tool to forming pupils` own views on other individuals, other groups, different religions, physical features or simply "the otherness'' and "the unknown''. Language as a tool of complex cognition helps to prevent mechanical and thoughtless accepting of stereotypes.

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9. ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

What has been stated about the Czech language must be only emphasized while speaking about foreign languages.'[K]nowledge of a foreign language is a key factor in mutual communication and in understanding other nations` cultures. Foreign languages are of practical importance for personal, educational and labour mobility. They represent a tool for reading original sources when learning about life and about European and world culture (FEP BE 2005:97).

Mainly English, as a global language, has its irreplaceable function as a tool of complex cognition within European and global contexts. English, to be more precise ELT, while speaking about education, is a process involving participants of different colour, religion, native language and many more characteristic features, and a process which can enable to overcome stereotypes as a possible source of intolerance, prejudices, and discrimination. The knowledge of the outputs of Schneider`s research may be applied by teachers in their English teaching activities such as simulations, role-plays and others. The aim of modern education, as emphasized in the Czech curricular reform and reflected in the Framework Education Programme, is to combat intolerance and stereotypes. To do so, first of all, it is necessary to define what stereotypes are, and Schneider`s Psychology of Stereotyping seems to be an important source of information concerning stereotypes, and, moreover, a useful help to realize the crucial role of English language teaching. ELT places learners in the direct contact with other learners and knowing English enables them to communicate with different people and cultures, which seems to be crucial in the changing world at the beginning of the 21st century. English can be understood as a tool in fulfilling objectives of the Framework Education Programme to the complex development of the learner`s personality.

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RÉSUMÉ

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Dosažení cílů stanovených Rámcovým vzdělávacím programem pro základní vzdělávání není jednoduché. Jedním z těchto cílů je vyvarování se předsudků a stereotypů jako možných příčin ale i důsledků diskriminace. Tato problematika se přímo objevuje nejen v průřezových tématech ale je i úzce spjata s klíčovými kompetencemi a zejména s celým pojetím a cíly základního vzdělávání. Právě při realizaci Rámcového vzdělávacího programu může být Schneiderova Psychologie stereotypů velmi užitečná. Zejména při výuce angličtiny či při výuce v angličtině se přímo nabízí praktické využití závěrů Schneiderova výzkumu v celé škále aktivit jako je role-play či různé typy simulačních cvičení. Je důležité vědět, co to stereotypy vůbec jsou, jaké jsou jejich zdroje, jakými postupy vznikají, ale i jak negativně mohou ovlivnit celý vyučovací proces. To platí zejména v současnosti, v době výchovy k myšlení v evropských a globálních souvislostech. Kontext angličtiny jako globálního komunikačního nástroje naléhavost výzkumu této problematiky ještě umocňuje.

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