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**The contribution and the role
of formal and informal education
to the building of interreligious
and interethnic tolerance
among primary school students
in the Republic of Macedonia**

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Abstract

The establishment of tolerance seems to be an objective necessity for modern society. This necessity gives rise to the formation of new social and economic relations. Therefore it is of particular importance that the education system builds a scientific foundation adapted to these changes. Interreligious tolerance among students is an active moral stance, expressed through readiness to acknowledge, accept, understand and respect religious diversity and originality throughout the process of interaction among subjects within a multi-religious society. An analysis is made of both (a) informal education projects implemented with sixth graders from Skopje, the capital city of Republic of Macedonia, and (b) these students' elective subjects in primary school (*Ethics of Religions and Introduction to Religions and Religious Practices*) with the aim of determining the contribution of these two inputs to establish interreligious and multiethnic tolerance among these students.

Key words: *interreligious tolerance, religious education*

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Introduction

A distinct characteristic of Macedonia, like many other Balkan countries, is that the country is built upon a historic union of different ethnic groups, cultures and religions. In present conditions, we should also consider the interests of all people and cultures within the country, from which stem various changes in politics, economy and social relations. This is causing an increase of confessional awareness. To maintain the stability in the country, it is necessary to focus our attention on the development of cultural interreligious relations and on the harmony between faiths. The foundation for civil society and the state should be the acknowledgment of this multicultural and multi-religious basis as well as the formation of friendly interreligious relations on the grounds of a flexible policy conducted mainly in the field of education.

Tolerance and education

Tolerance is a phenomenon that significantly influences the social climate, interpersonal relations and policy, therefore the development of tolerance is considered a valuable endeavor of Macedonian society. Highlighting the importance of the human factor Schrader wrote: "A horrible catastrophe threatens mankind. It is not only a nuclear, climatic and a similar variant of the physical destruction of mankind and all things living on Earth, but beyond that, the destruction of humanity within humans. And before we learn how to protect nature, how to avoid wars and conflicts, poverty etc., we should understand how to remain human, not only a reasonable being, but also conscious and conscientious" (Schrader, 1999, pg. 5).

Answering the question 'what role does education have in the instruction about tolerance?' and by extension, whether education even affects the level of tolerance, Ewers claims that knowing Gödel's theorem, does not make an atheist tolerant towards orthodox monotheists. But education provides the necessary and much important possibility for the reconsideration of our own, and also acquired attitudes and positions. Understanding other cultures and societies is by far the best ground for establishing of friendly and tolerant interactions. Still, we need something more than just that. In addition to knowledge and interaction with people of different faith, we need to establish a system of values within which tolerance acts as a benefactor (Evers, 2001. pg. 39).

The role of education is considered important by many researchers. Thereby, it is absolutely true that education today will affect the future of every nation. When it comes to human conscience, morals, values and behavior, it is apparent that these factors must be included among the main factors that promote and improve education. According to Gershunskiy, education, by principle, works for the future: it determines personal qualities, knowledge, competence, habits, attitudes and behavior, and therefore the economic, spiritual and moral potential of society as a whole, and by extension, that of civilization (Gershunskiy, 1998, pg. 15).

In the past few years, a problem has appeared in the attempt to reduce upbringing solely to education. This, however, contradicts the experience of pedagogical science. Resolving this problem would pave the way to the resolution of many social problems. Actually, the final goal of education should not only be the quality and quantity of the knowledge achieved by students. The goal should also be forming positive personalities in students. The final results of education should be graded not only by immediate observation and strongly controlled parameters for efficient pedagogical activities, but long-term activity evaluations are very important. In this case, we should consider long-term results in relation to the mental priorities and parameters of a certain society, considering also the dynamics of human values and ideals, and the changing criteria for people's and society's material and spiritual progress.

A quality education implies an upbringing in humane activities, spirituality and conscience. In this mindset, the educational system still does not perform its primary function – the synthesis of education and upbringing, the development of the material and spiritual within a person. Free from one's values, ideals and motives, a person may lose his or her conscience, intellect, creativity; one may lose touch with logical, critical and mathematical thought and in turn become a robot that exists only to do the government's bidding, says Aryngazin (2005). This contributes towards a traditional system of education within a society. As a consequence, we have low level of spirituality and mental activity, but also the depressive attitude of future generations. Therefore this author is convinced that: "The main idea for the development of human civilization is people's spiritual upbringing" (Aryngazin, 2005, pg. 185).

The process of pedagogy must be an authentic educational process that promotes the accumulation of a person's entire experience in education as well as in upbringing. Education primarily focuses on developing knowledge, nurturing the mind and fulfilling cognitive needs within the educational activity. On the other hand, upbringing is important for the development of a person and it should be a carrier of the eternal values of a spiritual culture.

Development of interreligious tolerance among students

The need for forming interreligious tolerance among students in Macedonia is defined by the fact that the youth of the early 21st century are generally intolerant of national and religious pluralism. Many of them are raised and educated in families where stereotypes and prejudice against diversity have been cherished. According to philosophical, pedagogical, psychological and socio-cultural studies, tolerance is an active moral position of a person expressed in his/her readiness to acknowledge, accept, understand and respect the diversity and originality of all individuals in the process of interaction among subjects in a multicultural society. In this case, interreligious tolerance among students is an active moral position of a person, which expresses the readiness to acknowledge, accept, understand and respect religious diversity and originality of subjects in a multicultural society.

The core of the term *interreligious tolerance* therefore includes qualities such as readiness, acceptance, acknowledgment, understanding and respect. To determine the nature of these qualities, we need to take into account their interpretation (Schrader, 1999).

- Readiness – to be prepared mentally or physically for some experience or action. Preparing for action - a state of mobilization of the entire psycho-physical system of a person with the end goal of efficiently implementing certain activities. Therefore, a person with a formed sense of interreligious tolerance will be characterized by readiness to provide acknowledgment, acceptance, understanding and respect of a religious other.
- Acknowledgment – the assessment of effort; a positive attitude towards something; the decision to bring about a conclusion for someone or something. In the context of interreligious tolerance, acknowledgment would mean that certain interpretations may be considered valid and feasible. The presence of a positive attitude towards a different worldview regardless of subjective experiences and religious differences.
- Acceptance – openness to the other; a positive attitude towards something; within our definition, it means an expressed openness and a positive attitude towards individuals with different faiths than one's own.
- Understanding – the ability to interpret and comprehend the contents and meaning of something. Developing interreligious tolerance encompasses, at least from the subject's point of

view, an understanding of expressed capabilities of the object, a desire to understand the sense, contents and meaning of faith, as well as the wide range of religious denominations.

- Respect – respectful behavior; appreciation and consideration based on acknowledgment of someone else's effort. Respect in terms of religious tolerance is towards the religious convictions of others and the acknowledgment of their dignity, regardless of the subject's position on religion.

The contribution of informal education in the Republic of Macedonia to the development of interreligious tolerance among students

In order to separate education from politics and political situations within a society, the educational process should be continually improved by implementing principles of interethnic and intercultural tolerance. To promote dialogue as a means of peaceful conflict resolution and the de-politicization of education as well as to reduce certain tensions among students, parents, teachers and other societal factors, the non-governmental sector in the field of education and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia compiled the Declaration for De-politicizing Education, Multiethnic Tolerance, and Non-violent Communication on September 9th, 2009. With the signing of this declaration, all participants in the educational process as well as the societal factors involved, are obligated, within their capacities, to contribute to the de-politicization of education, the promotion of interethnic tolerance and the advancement of dialogue, as basic means for communicating and solving conflicts through:

- Consistently and indiscriminately implementing constitutional principles and legislation concerning the educational process and the fundamentally accepted international regulations.
- Consistently implementing control mechanisms, functions and quality standards that work towards respecting these regulations, to counter favoritism of individuals based on their ethnicity or political orientation.
- Regularly tracking the conditions and relations among students, emphasizing ethnically mixed schools as well as promoting the goal of this declaration through meetings of the relevant state and local authorities, school boards and parent committees, student organizations and non-governmental organizations, with the aim of promptly and effectively resolving conflict.
- Increasing the vocational capacities of the teaching staff for reacting appropriately in tense situations through continuous professional education on mediation, the peaceful resolution of conflict and affirmative communication.
- Implementing projects for students' intensive socialization, especially students coming from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, where students' creativity and inventiveness is emphasized.
- Promoting cooperation and dialogue between the Ministry of Education and Science, municipalities, schools, the civic sector, parents and students, for continuous and mutual problem solving for everyday issues.
- Continuously promoting new policies, measures and activities whose aim is the complete and consistent implementation of the core and goals of this declaration.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia, civic organizations and other signatories of this declaration are committed to focus on respecting and realizing the aims and the regulations brought about by this declaration. The Ministry of Education and Science takes it upon itself to regularly follow the implementation of the regulations of this declaration and to regularly report to the signatories and the public about the advances in the process of de-politicizing education, as well as informing them about interethnic tolerance and non-violent communication (Declaration for De-politicizing Education, Multiethnic Tolerance, and Non-violent Communication, 2009).

As a result of the declaration's obligations, non-governmental organizations have conducted a series of projects in education with the aim of strengthening interethnic and interreligious tolerance among students. This article explains and evaluates the relevant projects conducted by the non-governmental organization Reporters for the Rights of Women and Children and the Preservation of the Environment in the Republic of Macedonia. This organization provides informal education for students coming from ethnically mixed communities and the goal is to find positive solutions for communicating with others and to generally send a positive message about this theme to the public. There have been four informal education projects with primary and high school students which are described below.

The Need for Religious Studies in Primary Schools was a project organized for primary and secondary school students with the support of the Dutch youth foundation ALERT. 100 students ranging from fourth to eight grade participated in the project, which included the following schools: Blaze Koneski – with students of Macedonian and Serbian nationality – and Kiril i Metodij – with students of Macedonian and Albanian nationality. The project was conducted in 2009 and it lasted for six months. The activities were conducted inside the schools, but outside classes. The project included lectures on the ethics of religions. The idea was to use roundtables with students of different nationalities to assess their familiarity with the subject and their interest in the subject's inclusion in their school programming. The roundtables were open to students of both schools and all students had the opportunity to ask questions about a religion of those with beliefs different from their own. Some of the questions asked were: “Why do you color eggs at Easter?”, “Why do you call God Allah and we call him Jesus Christ?” and “What is God?”. The questions were answered by students with the mentor's guidance.

The interest among student participants in the project about religious conscience and beliefs increased as a result, both for their own religion but for the religions of others as well. However, the students whose religion was Islam were more interested and knew more about religion (even Christianity) than Christians. Serbian students showed more interest and knew more than Macedonian students, which brought about the conclusion that Macedonian students are not very well informed and showed little interest in learning about religion. When asked what they would prefer between studying Information Technology (IT) or religion, 70% of students gave a preference for IT, while 30% preferred religion.

The project *Ethics, Religion and Water* was conducted with the support of the Lansa Foundation of the Catholic Church in Italy from 1999 to 2001. During this project, about 120 sixth and seventh grade students of Macedonian and Albanian nationality from the Skopje area participated in workshops about religion, ethics, and ecology. The activities were carried out after the regular school hours. This was a pilot project meant to initiate a bigger project. It sought to propagate and develop tolerance through lectures and drawings in the form of self-education and without expected results.

The third project was entitled *Improving Interethnic Relations among High School Students in*

Tetovo, Kicevo and Struga from 2009 to 2011. The project was supported by the Ecumenical Women's Initiative and the Macedonian Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. It focused mainly on students' education, but it also encompassed work with the boards of parents and teachers. The project included around three hundred students from the aforementioned three cities in Macedonia. For the most part, the students were not experiencing conflict as much as their parents and teachers, especially in the high school Niko Nestor in Struga, where there was some tension in relations and interethnic intolerance. There were many cases of Albanian parents prohibiting their children from going to school in the same shift as Macedonian students. Even though education in Struga's primary schools is mostly bilingual and Albanian and Macedonian students attend classes in the same shift, interethnic intolerance developed in the high school. The atmosphere in Macedonia at the time seems to have contributed to the development of the situation. In this high school, 70% of the teachers were Albanian and most of them did not want to cooperate with their colleagues of Macedonian nationality. As a result of the negotiations of this project, they reached an agreement and mixed boards of parents were formed which contributed to the union of Macedonian and Albanian students in the same shift of the high school. This lasted for a certain period of time, but again interethnic tensions and intolerance arose and today classes are in different shifts once again. With the projects in Kicevo and Tetovo, however, no such tensions or intolerance was recorded. Students were well aware of having good interethnic relations and their importance, and parents themselves asked to cooperate.

Tolerance with No Stereotypes was a project conducted from 2009 until 2011 with the support from the UNDP. The goal of the project was to educate a group of youth to spread the idea of life without prejudices further than the boundaries of the project itself. Among the 300 participants were high school students from Skopje, Kumanovo, Kicevo and Struga. It was conducted on two levels; the first level included primarily high school students while the second level included also news reporters from the aforementioned cities. In the latter, reporters were trained in dealing with subjects such as interethnic intolerance.

The project sought to motivate students to write essays on the subject of either *Multiethnic Coexistence or Life without Tolerance* during their year of study. At the end of the year, the project's coordinators chose one hundred of the most inventive students for a three-day debate in Struga. During the debate, students openly discussed the possibilities for creating a more tolerant world. The workshop with reporters from the local media took place simultaneously. They were educated about how to deal with such sensitive subjects, by writing educational rather than articles that could spark interethnic intolerance and hostility. After the debate and the workshop, students and reporters participated in a final conference in Skopje, where they had the opportunity to face one another. In this project, students began to ask questions openly, such as "Why does one's nationality matter when a crime has been committed or one has otherwise contributed to an unfortunate event?", "Why, in your texts, are we divided by nationality as Macedonian or Albanian when we are all children?", "Why do your texts so often focus on commotion and scandal?", "Why do you write about the Roma populace with so much ridicule?" The reporters did not have appropriate or satisfying answers to these questions. The conclusion of this project is that Macedonia still has a capacity for coexistence. The young generations do desire to live together and to understand each other but they also require support from the older generations, and also the media, which, according to them, provoke most of the strife between nationalities.

A Facebook group was created out of this project with around 10,000 members, from Macedonia and other European countries. Through Facebook, the members continued to work on achieving the goals of this project in a wider sense. The project therefore conveyed the idea, and the students

themselves continued to further the idea and the goal of the project in order to become an example for the interethnic coexistence between youth in Macedonia.

After the end of all four projects, an evaluation was made detailing several indicators: the number of participants/the audience, the number of printed materials and their distribution, the number of members of social groups, number of parents involved with the boards of parents in schools and the number of meetings conducted. All projects were deemed successful, with a positive grade from the evaluators.

Besides the non-governmental organization Reporters for the Rights of Women and Children and the Preservation of the Environment in the Republic of Macedonia, many other non-governmental organizations working on the field of education have made efforts to reach the goals of the Declaration for De-politicizing Education, Multiethnic Tolerance, and Non-violent Communication. For example, the project *Interethnic Integration in Education*, carried out by USAID, is conducted in many schools in the Republic of Macedonia. Within this project, primary schools with primarily Macedonian students are becoming partners with the primary schools with primarily Albanian or Roma students, and they conduct some activities together, such as sports competitions, mutual English lessons or visits to religious sites.

According to the chief executive of Reporters for the Rights of Women and Children and the Preservation of the Environment in the Republic of Macedonia, young people find informal education more acceptable than formal education, where teachers do not attempt to discuss sensitive subject for fear of being accused of causing unrest or provoking colleagues, parents or supervisors. Additionally, when the students take part in the activities of informal education, they truly express their ideas, since their responses are not subject to the teacher's evaluation. Therefore informal education has opened doors when it comes to sensitive subjects and there are no taboos.

The contribution of formal education in the Republic of Macedonia to the development of interreligious and interethnic tolerance among students

Apart from the series of informal education projects conducted in schools outside of class activities, which are brokered by non-governmental organizations, as of 2010 in Macedonia, the optional classes Ethics of Religions and Introduction to Religions have been introduced in schools as part of the curriculum for sixth grade students in primary school.¹ These classes are the second part of this analysis of education for the development of interreligious and interethnic tolerance among students in Macedonia.

Ethics of Religions classes study ethics as a science of goodness and morality and combine the common principles of religious teachings (Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Catholic and Evangelical Methodist teachings). The contents of this subject allow the students to study the ethics of the most practiced religions in the Republic of Macedonia. The goals of Ethics of Religions in the study program are as follows. The student should: be introduced to ethics as a science of goodness and morality; be introduced to the ethics of Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Catholicism, Judaism and the ethics of Evangelical Methodist teachings; be introduced to the basic ethical terms regarding religions; receive basic knowledge about the Bible, the Qur'an, the Talmud as well as the means of interpretation and understanding the holy books; be able to recognize that religions teach people to accept and respect human behavior; be familiar with and respect the different religions of people in Macedonian society and develop tolerance, dialogue, respect and cooperation with others (Curriculum for the subject Ethics of Religions, 2010).

¹ These two courses are electives in the sixth grade and parents choose them for their children. All children in the schools researched for this paper were attending one of these courses so there was no control group.

Introduction to Religions classes, on the other hand, study the values of the great world religions, the nature of the religions themselves, their beginnings and importance for humankind in general. The goals of *Introduction to Religions* as a study program are as follows. The student should: be introduced to the importance and meaning of religion in human life; be introduced to reasons for and beginnings of these religions and their functions; be introduced to the fact that no human community exists without some elements of religious beliefs or practices; learn about dominant religions in the modern world; learn how to respect different religions and develop capabilities and skills for dialogue and cooperation with people with different religious beliefs (Curriculum for the subject *Introduction to Religions*, 2010).

There has not been much research detailing the goals of these subjects during the year of study, therefore it is up to the researcher to answer the following question: Does education on these subjects, namely *Ethics of Religions* and *Introduction to Religions*, contribute to increased respect from students towards the different religions and does it develop skills of tolerance, dialogue, respect and cooperation with students from a different ethnicities and religious convictions than themselves?

Research Methodology

The research hypothesis of the formal education part of this article was: the respect expressed towards different religions and the development of tolerance, respect, dialogue and cooperation for/with students from other ethnicities and religious convictions than themselves are different among the same-age students and this depends mainly on whether they have taken the course *Ethics of Religions* or *Introduction to Religions*.

Population and sample: The research was conducted in February 2014, with 357 participants from four primary schools in Skopje: J. H. Pestaloci (66 students), H. T. Karpos (55 students), Bratstvo (85 students) and Hasan Prishtina (152 students).

Target population: Students from the sixth and seventh grade in primary schools throughout the Republic of Macedonia.

Available population: Students of Macedonian nationality from the 6th and 7th grade in primary schools participating in *Ethics of Religions* as a subject; students of Macedonian nationality from the 6th and 7th grade in primary schools participating in *Introduction to Religions* as a subject; students of Albanian nationality from the 6th and 7th grade in primary schools participating in the subject *Ethics of Religions*; students of Albanian nationality from the 6th and 7th grade in primary schools participating in the subject *Introduction to Religions*. An appropriate sample of students was used, i.e. students present in class while the research was conducted.

Data collection: The author made a survey containing 24 items, which was in Macedonian language for the students of Macedonian nationality and in Albanian language for the students of Albanian nationality. The scale indicated the relation of students towards people different than themselves in regards to nationality and religious affiliation; for each question, students marked one of four possible answers: a) almost always true, b) usually true, c) usually not true, d) almost never true. These answers were rated 5, 4, 2 and 1 point, respectively. Every unanswered question was considered to convey "I do not know" or "I am not sure how to answer" and was rated 3 points. The maximum score on the survey was 120 and the minimum 24.

Data analysis: The results of this research were processed with the SPSS statistics software. Among the calculations were frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, standard deviation and variance (One-way ANOVA). Partial comparisons were made using the Bonferroni post-hoc test. The following tables convey the results of testing the hypothesis, according to which the *same-age students*

expressed differences in respect towards different religions and different levels of the skills of tolerance, respect, dialogue and cooperation for/with students from other ethnic or religious affiliations, depending on which of the two classes they were taking. The noted difference is statistically significant on a level of 0.01 ($p < 0.01$).

Research results

The research included 358 students in total: 50.8% were male and 49.2% were female. The students were eleven years old (56.7%) and twelve years old (43.1%). Macedonian students made up 46.1% of the subjects and students of Albanian nationality 53.9%. Of the students surveyed, 48.9% were participating in the subject *Ethics of Religions* and 51.2% in *Introduction to Religions*. 30.7% of the students surveyed were Macedonians and 18.2% Albanians in *Ethics of Religions*, while 15.4% were Macedonian and 35.8% Albanian in *Introduction to Religions*.

There was a statistically significant difference among these four groups of students in the total result of the survey ($p < 0,01$), which confirms the hypothesis. Macedonian and Albanian students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* showed greater respect towards different religions and had better developed skills of tolerance, respect, dialogue and cooperation for/with students from other ethnicities and religious convictions than themselves than Macedonian and Albanian students who participated in *Introduction of Religion* (Table 1). The maximum number of points possible on the survey was 120 and the minimum 24.

Table 1. Survey overview: average survey scores and differences among groups of students

Overall results of the survey						
Nationality	Subject	Number of participants	Mean (points)	Std. Deviation (points)	F	Sig.
Macedonians	Ethics of Religions	110	111.7364	8.28249	20.167	**.000
	Introduction to Religions	55	105.7818	11.80347		
Albanians	Ethics of Religions	65	111.0308	9.64846		
	Introduction to Religions	128	101.8906	12.43138		
Total		358	107.1732	11.53745		

Note: ** - The mean difference is significant at the level 0.01 ($p < 0.01$).

Table 2 presents the average answer and the differences in answers given by groups of students surveyed in relation to individual questions from questionnaire. The answers were assigned points from one to five (where 1 = almost never true and 5 = almost always true). A more detailed explanation follows the table.

Table 2 Students' answers to the survey questions by course and nationality: averages & differences

→ Nationality		Macedonians						Albanians			
→	Subject of the question	Ethics of Religions		Introduction to Religions		Ethics of Religions		Introduction to Religions			
↓	Items:	Mean	Std.D.	Mean	Std.D.	Mean	Std.D.	Mean	Std.D.	F	Sig.
1.	Respecting every student	4.85	.539	4.71	.567	3.77	1.529	4.61	.924	19,857	**0.000
2.	Positive relations with every student	4.82	.609	4.62	.707	4.85	.667	4.63	.905	2.254	.082
3.	Usage of insulting words towards those different than myself	4.85	.633	4.76	.637	4.74	.973	4.37	1.380	5.148	**0.002
4.	Befriending those who are different	4.65	1.001	4.20	1.325	4.71	1.027	4.05	1.557	6.256	**0.000
5.	Socializing with those different than myself	4.75	.735	4.64	.868	4.65	1.007	3.88	1.607	13.279	**0.000
6.	Decent behavior towards those different than myself	4.65	.962	4.18	1.467	4.43	1.287	3.68	1.707	10.362	**0.000
7.	Helping those different than myself	4.75	.756	4.69	.814	4.57	1.185	4.38	1.281	2.683	*.047
8.	Communicating with those different than myself	4.75	.795	4.60	.974	4.66	1.050	4.29	1.387	3.759	*.011
9.	All religions have ethical principles	4.75	.815	4.25	1.236	4.74	.923	4.44	.105	4.031	**0.008
10.	One moral code for mutual respect	4.93	.422	4.76	.719	4.92	.444	4.76	.811	2.033	.109
11.	Good people are valued and appreciated everywhere	4.68	.877	4.40	1.047	4.91	.551	4.14	1.373	9.233	**0.000
12.	Respecting the values of those different than myself	4.70	.711	4.51	.879	4.95	.372	4.45	1.149	5.405	**0.001
13.	Respect towards all – the most important rule for peaceful coexistence	4.78	.682	4.51	.979	4.92	.510	4.61	.907	3.705	*.012
14.	We are all different and differences make us special	4.34	1.322	4.09	1.456	4.95	.372	3.98	1.567	8.108	**0.000
15.	Having friends who are different than myself	4.63	.937	4.44	1.214	4.89	.504	3.92	1.585	11.727	**0.000
16.	Avoiding conflicts and situations that could lead to conflict	4.27	1.374	3.95	1.520	3.28	1.949	3.10	1.826	11.209	**0.000
17.	Friendliness towards people of different religious convictions and faiths	4.79	.651	4.49	.998	4.57	1.250	3.93	1.568	10.927	**0.000
18.	Dialogue among religions	4.65	.737	4.22	1.083	4.69	.934	4.36	1.278	3.535	*.015
19.	Religions are against the disruption of human dignity	3.65	1.726	3.36	1.544	3.48	1.905	3.84	2.531	.855	.465
20.	All people deserve respect	4.93	.294	4.73	.827	4.98	.124	4.65	.985	4.990	**0.002
21.	Having time for those not part of my group of friends	4.35	1.097	4.04	1.333	4.66	1.079	4.15	1.506	3.107	*.027
22.	Solidarity, humaneness and compassion towards everyone	4.83	.522	4.75	.645	4.92	.510	4.66	.951	2.296	.077
23.	Helping the poor regardless of their ethnicity or religious affiliation	4.51	1.047	4.51	1.183	4.83	.720	4.41	1.226	4.024	**0.008
24.	Joining actions of solidarity for people different than myself	4.87	.431	4.73	.732	4.95	.276	4.63	.921	4.258	**0.006

Note: * - The mean difference is insignificant at the level 0.05 ($p < 0.05$); ** - The mean difference is significant at the level 0.01 ($p < 0.01$).

The following results of the survey are observable:

- In answer to the question whether every student should be respected as a person regardless of ability, talent, gender, race, culture, tradition, social status, national or religious affiliation and so on, there is a statistically important difference between groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,01$). Considerably more Macedonian students answered positively to this question than Albanian students regardless of the course they were studying (Table 2, number 1).
- In answer to the question whether the student should be concerned with and contribute to the development of positive relations with all students based upon friendship, there was no statistically significant difference in the groups of students surveyed ($p > 0,05$). In all groups of students surveyed we can see mostly positive answers to this question (Table 2, number 2).
- In answer to the question whether the student is allowed to use insulting or otherwise inappropriate words towards students of different religious or national affiliations, there is a statistically significant difference in the groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,01$). Considerably more Macedonian and Albanian students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* and Macedonian students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* answered this question negatively than Albanian students studying *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 3).
- In answer to the question “Should we make friends with those who are different?” there is statistically important difference between the groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,01$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered this question positively than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 4).
- In answer to the question whether the student has friends of different ethnic and religious affiliation, there is a statistically important difference between the groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,01$). Considerably more Macedonian and Albanian students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* and Macedonian students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* answered this question positively than Albanian students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 5).
- In answer to the question whether the student employs decent behavior towards students with different ethnic and religious affiliations, there is a statistically important difference between the groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,01$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered positively to this question than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions*, regardless of nationality (Table 2, number 6).
- In answer to the question whether the student helps students of different religious or ethnic affiliations, there is a statistically significant difference between the groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,05$). Considerably more Macedonian students answered positively to this question than Albanian students, regardless of course participation (Table 2, number 7).
- In answer to the question whether one should communicate with students of different ethnic and religious affiliations, there is a statistically significant difference between the groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,05$). Considerably more Macedonian and Albanian students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* and Macedonian students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* answered positively to this question than Albanian students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 8).
- In answer to the question whether every religion includes ethical or moral principles for good behavior in it's teaching, there is a statistically important difference between groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,01$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of*

Religions answered positively to this question than students answering positively and who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 9).

- In answer to the question whether there is a one moral code found in all religions that teaches respect for all people of the world, there is little difference in the answers of students surveyed ($p>0,05$). All groups of students surveyed gave generally positive answers to this question (Table 2, number 10).
- In answer to the question whether good people are important to everybody and whether they are equally appreciated and valued in all religions and all societies, there is a statistically important difference between the groups of students surveyed ($p<0,01$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered positively than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 11).
- In answer to the question whether we are obliged to respect the values of people different than ourselves, there is a statistically important difference between the groups of students surveyed ($p<0,01$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered positively to this question than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 12).
- In answer to the question whether respecting and understanding others regardless of the differences between us is the most important rule, there is a statistically significant difference between the groups of students surveyed ($p<0,05$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered positively to this question than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 13).
- In answer to the question whether differences make us special and act upon our development as persons with different characters and traits, there is a statistically significant difference among the groups of students surveyed ($p<0,01$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered positively to this question than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 14).
- In answer to the question whether the student chooses to befriend students of different national or religious affiliations than his/her own, there is a statistically significant difference among the groups of students surveyed ($p<0,01$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered positively to this question than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 15).
- In answer to the question whether every student is obliged to avoid any circumstances that could cause religious quarrels or arguments and possible feuds or hostility, there is a statistically significant difference among the groups of students surveyed ($p<0,01$). Considerably more Macedonian students answered positively to this question than Albanian students, regardless of course participation (Table 2, number 16).
- In answer to the question whether people are obliged to be friendly towards everyone, including those with a different religious affiliation and those with no religious affiliation at all, there is statistically important difference between groups of students surveyed ($p<0,01$). Considerably more Macedonian and Albanian students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* and Macedonian students who participate in *Introduction to Religions* answered positively to this question than Albanian students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 17).
- In answer to the question whether all religions in the world support dialogue, religious toler-

ance and understanding among people, there is a statistically significant difference between groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,05$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered positively to this question than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 18).

- In answer to the question whether religions are against those who disrupt the dignity of human life and those who oppose moral values, there is no statistically significant difference between groups of students surveyed ($p > 0,05$). In all groups we can see mostly positive answers to this question (Table 2, number 19).
- In answer to the question whether all people of the world, regardless of their religion, race, ethnicity, or skin color deserve respect and dignity, there is statistically significant difference between groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,01$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered positively to this question than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 20).
- In answer to the question whether the student finds time to befriend individuals outside his/her group of friends and those different than him/her in ethnicity and religious affiliation, there is a statistically significant difference between groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,05$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered positively to this question than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 21).
- In answer to the question whether one ought to show solidarity, humaneness and compassion towards all people, regardless of ethnicity or religious affiliation, there is no statistically important difference among the groups of students surveyed ($p > 0,05$). All groups of students surveyed answered mostly positively to this question (Table 2, number 22).
- In answer to the question whether one ought to help the poor, even if they belong to a different ethnic group and religious affiliation than myself, there is a statistically significant difference between groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,01$). Considerably more Albanian students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered positively to this question than Macedonian and Albanian students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* and Macedonian students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* (Table 2, number 23).
- In answer to the question whether one ought to join solidarity actions when people of different nationalities and religious affiliations than myself need help, there is a statistically significant difference between groups of students surveyed ($p < 0,01$). Considerably more students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* answered positively to this question than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* (Table 2, number 24).

Discussing the results

According to the results of the survey, students who participated in *Ethics of Religions* have generally expressed more respect towards people of different religions and have more developed skills of tolerance and respect for as well as dialogue and cooperation with students of different ethnic and religious affiliations than students who participated in *Introduction to Religions*.

Students whose curriculum involves the study of *Ethics of Religions* have expressed their positive attitudes towards people of different ethnic and religious affiliation more than the students whose curriculum involves the subject *Introduction to Religions*. This finding is based on the following survey question themes: the usage of insulting words towards those different than myself, friendship and socialization with those different than myself; decent behavior towards those different than myself;

communication with those different than myself; awareness that all religions have developed ethical principles and that all people deserve respect; awareness that good people are important and appreciated everywhere; respect for the values of people different than myself; awareness that people differ and that it makes them unique; agreement that respecting all people is the most important rule for coexistence; nurturing a friendly approach to people of different faiths and considering dialogue across religions necessary; finding time for friendship with students outside one's group and showing solidarity towards those different than oneself.

Students of Albanian nationality who participated in *Ethics of Religions* showed greater solidarity towards the poor regardless of their religious affiliation and ethnicity, than the other groups of students in the survey. However, Albanian students who participated in *Introduction to Religions* gave the fewest positive answers in the survey overall. The fewest of them answered positively to the indicators of tolerance to differences in religion and nationality.

Macedonian nationality students expressed greater respect towards other students regardless of ability, talent, gender, race, culture, tradition, social status, ethnicity and religious affiliation, than the Albanian students, regardless of the course in which they participated. They also expressed a higher awareness for the need to help those different than themselves and to communicate and socialize with those different than themselves; their answers also indicated they are more inclined to avoid confrontational situations when it comes to religion.

There was no considerable difference in the attitudes of students regarding the following themes: whether the student should care for and contribute to the development of positive relations with all students via friendship; whether there is one moral code for respecting all humankind which is taught by all religions; whether religions are opposed to those that disrupt the dignity of human life and those that act in opposition to moral values; and whether we are obliged to show solidarity, humaneness and compassion towards all people, regardless of national and religious affiliation. In all groups of students surveyed we can see mostly positive responses to these themes.

The results conclude that the subject *Ethics of Religions*, which has the intention to introduce students to the ethical dimensions of different religions and to emphasize that religions teach about human behavior between people, has contributed more to the development of the skills of tolerance than the subject *Introduction to Religions*, which has the goal of teaching the students about religious beliefs and practices. However we should not disregard the generally high questionnaire scores of students who had the subject *Introduction to Religions*, even if they are lower in comparison with those who studied *Ethics of Religions*. This means one of the goals of this program of formal education was achieved: the development of skills and capacities for dialogue and cooperation with those different from myself. We should, however, remember that other factors could have influenced these results, such as the quality of study materials and teaching, the behavior of teachers teaching these subjects, the environment of the students and so on.

Conclusion

Developing tolerance is an objective need of modern society and also, as this article has highlighted, specifically the society of the Republic of Macedonia. This necessity gives rise to the formation of new social and economic relations in society. Therefore it is of particular importance that the education system builds a scientific foundation adapted to these changes. Education may use its potential for consolidating society, surpassing tensions and social conflicts based on the priorities of human rights, making efforts towards the goal of equitable national cultures and respect for different faiths, as well as contributing towards social equality.

Interreligious tolerance is an active moral stance of a person, expressed through a readiness to acknowledge, accept, understand and respect religious diversity and originality throughout the process of interaction among subjects, within the circumstances of a multi-religious society. This kind of tolerance appears in students' attitudes, motivations and personal, contextual and reflexive components, as well as their behavior. Developing interreligious tolerance among students can be achieved through a process of pedagogical influences in education and upbringing that can influence these attitudes, thought processes and behaviors. The desired result is a person possessing qualities characterized as religiously tolerant: e.g. respectful of different religions and respect and cooperation with those from other ethnic or religious affiliations.

According to this aim, education should provide students with the means to develop confidence without making others look bad. Schools should also therefore help students compare and challenge their own concepts and values with those of others. Many researchers studying this problem are against the ideological manipulation of religious education by those working for their own interests instead of the interests of children and youth. Those promoting tolerance, as described in the section of this article on informal education, seek to stop the spread of stereotypes by representing religions in all their diversity and the complexity of cultural expressions.

Considering the results of the survey research, we can conclude that the subject *Ethics of Religions* contributes more to achieving these goals than the subject *Introduction to Religions*. Considering the fact that interethnic conflict and interreligious intolerance are frequent among high school students, it is recommended that these subjects and their contents be a part of the curriculum also for the upper grades of primary schools.

It is recommended also that such teaching activities should be continually supported by the informal education of non-governmental organizations, which advocate for interreligious tolerance and cooperation between young people in Macedonia of different religious and national origins. The non-governmental organization Reporters for the Rights of Women and Children and the Preservation of the Environment in the Republic of Macedonia, whose projects are presented in this work, seek to find positive solutions for communicating between different groups and sending positive messages about diversity to the public. The contribution of informal education to this problem is significant and should not be neglected because young people are open to this kind of education. Through informal education, young individuals feel that they can express their ideas more freely.

In the author's opinion, the form of religious education that exhibits these qualities for a better understanding of religious pluralism and which provides the opportunity to study religious values, including the value of peace, should be available to all students in the educational system and provide a space for young people from any or no religious affiliation to communicate together. Religious education can be a field of research for human values in the language of religions or it could become "a laboratory for peaceful education". This approach to religious education requires teachers who are highly versed in the study of religions and ethics. The participation of non-governmental organizations via informal education is a critical and complementary contribution to these ends.

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