

MULTICULTURALISM – “INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION” OR “CRITICAL EDUCATION”?!

Mariana ȚIBULAC

Institutul de Istorie al AȘM

This article analyses the role of educational opportunity in a time of globalisation, a new economy and life in a multicultural society, and gives an epistemological and semantic account of the concept “intercultural education”, distinguishing it from multicultural and transcultural education. Starting with a historic overview of various conceptualisations of meetings/clashes among people with different linguistic, religious, cultural or ethnic features, distinctive theoretical elaborations are reviewed, above all in a European context and in the educational field. After outlining the development of intercultural education (main contents, methods and objectives, as well as limits), this article supports the thesis that education, in multiculturalism, and in an intercultural sense, is currently the most appropriate answer to globalisation and interdependence.

Keywords: *intercultural education, multiculturalism, trans-cultural education, development of intercultural education.*

MULTICULTURALISMUL – „EDUCAȚIE INTERCULTURALĂ” SAU „EDUCAȚIE CRITICĂ”?!

În articol este analizat rolul educației și oportunitățile ce i se impun în perioada globalizării. Într-o societate multiculturală, aceasta oferă un aspect epistemologic și semantic conceptelor de *multiculturalism* și de *educație interculturală*. Începând cu o prezentare istorică a conceptelor sub diverse aspecte – lingvistic, religios, cultural sau etnic – acestea sunt revizuite, întâi de toate, în contextul educației europene. După conturarea esenței termenilor de multiculturalism și educație interculturală (conținutul, metodele și obiectivele, precum și limitele), susținem teza că educația, într-un sens amplu, este răspunsul cel mai adecvat la globalizare și interdependență.

Cuvinte-cheie: *educație interculturală, multiculturalism, educație transculturală, dezvoltarea educației interculturale.*

The idea of multiculturalism presents important challenges to society and thus to schooling. However, despite considerable lip service by opportunists, it is often not taken seriously enough. Instead it has become a catch-all term for a variety of different bandwagons; an almost meaningless buzzword justifying and incorporating a host of sometimes dysfunctional or counterproductive, sometimes competing or conflicting, sometimes self-serving, even one-sided educational practices. Because arts are central to the commonsense idea of "culture," many educators have recklessly gone along with this momentum. However if schooling is to contribute to the needs of our society, then music teachers need to take a critical stance on the role and value of education in life and thus of its reasonable place in schooling.

In a complex society, as a result, the conflicting needs and interests of subgroups cannot be satisfied as long as other groups make their own competing claims, and curriculum must be approached on bases other than as menu of discrete "tastes" chosen for sampling according to arbitrary criteria. Habermas in particular has been critical of this colonization of the lifeworld into autonomous institutionalized spheres (e.g., Habermas, 1970; Habermas, 1994). He looks instead to the rational reintegration of society by socializing free, responsible and moral agents whose communicative competence results in a non-arbitrary *practical rationality* upon which agreement can be reached on interpretation of universal human needs and interests (Habermas, 1984, 1987). This would be, then, the task of any critical theory of education.

The empowering of teachers with regard to the social and pragmatic consequences of curriculum has been called "critical education" (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) or "critical educational science" (Carson 1992, 102). Sociologist Joel Spring summarizes the movement in these words: Critical theorists find fault with both liberal and neo-conservative positions on the economy and education. Critical theorists emphasize an education for democratic empowerment, which simply means giving students the knowledge and skills they need to struggle for a continued expansion of political, economic, and social rights. Of utmost importance is making students aware that they have the power to affect the course of history and that history is the struggle for human rights. The goal of this critical theory of education, Spring continues, is to help students develop "a critical awareness of the social and political forces in society." This critical agenda, he concludes, appeals to many people because it offers the hope that education can lead to action as opposed to passive acceptance of the status quo.

Traditional methods of education might result in equality of opportunity, but they do not necessarily result in people trying to end those things that block the opportunities of all people. For critical feminists, critical pedagogy is a method for heightening awareness of the causes of female oppression. For critical integrationists, critical pedagogy is considered a method for educating people to struggle to end all forms of racism.

To begin with, the culturalist perspective accounts for culture in terms of the symbols, artifacts, and intellectual products that embody the shared values and habits of a group. Each sociocultural entity is seen as creating a certain basic personality and mindset that is passed on to successive generations as traditional knowledge and praxis; as the "essence" of what it means to belong to that group.

Secondly, each such group is seen as a unified or holistic cultural entity, the corollary being that different societies therefore represent necessarily distinct cultural viewpoints. The third contention of culturalism sees the value system of a given culture as to some degree delineated and determined by the values of dominant groups in the society. These cultural values, themes, heritages, traditions, resources, biases and blinders are transmitted to subsequent generations and to other new and marginal groups (e.g., immigrants) as *received* knowledge and values.

However, the fourth tenet of multiculturalism recognizes that certain dissimilar values can coexist as coherent social structures within a society. These "patterns of culture," as Ruth Benedict called them, are complementary and thus interconnected in their influence over society. Finally, multiculturalism sees individual consciousness itself as relative to and determined by the culture. Reality is seen, therefore, through the lens, so to speak, of the culture, which being self-created, is thus symbolic in its meanings and values.

Multiculturalism echoes (or perhaps creates) the "common sense" perspective about culture and cultures. But it has certain weaknesses and problems, not the least of which is that its pervasiveness promotes a persuasiveness that, not unlike ideology, can induce a false consciousness by which social issues are interpreted in a one-sided manner.

Moreover, because teaching and schooling require sociocultural interpretation, the limitations of the culturalist paradigm are of direct relevance to teachers. In general, then, the entire edifice of multiculturalism needs to be critically analyzed and put into rational perspective by teachers.

Culturalism thus rationalizes as somehow natural and unavoidable that normative cultural values are passed on intact to new generations and other newcomers. This "transmission" theory, then, implicitly recognizes the inevitability and thus the determinism of social or cultural conditioning. Taken literally in the common sense view, then, the individual has few or only inconsequential choices for personal agency. For culturalism, significant variation from cultural norms is seen as deviance or heresy, and most cultures actively work against the possibility of either individual freedom, or of consequential change in its institutional paradigms. Thus, multiculturalism clearly has difficulty accounting for unmistakable examples of adaptive, ahistorical, asocial, transformative change where entirely new values arise and dictate a revolution of consciousness and practice. The value of such change should be apparent. It is of particular importance if schooling and teachers are to be seen as agents of social progress and individual empowerment rather than as 'establishmentarians' of the status quo controlled by a particular power elite, including those leading various minorities.

Multiculturalism supports the idea that students and their backgrounds and experiences should be the center of their education and that learning should occur in a familiar context that attends to multiple ways of thinking. If done correctly, students will develop a positive perception of themselves by demonstrating knowledge about the culture, history, and contributions of diverse groups. This way, multiculturalism is a tool for instilling students with pride and confidence in their unique and special backgrounds.

Kincheloe and Steinberg in *Changing Multiculturalism* (1997) described confusion in the use of the terms "multiculturalism" and "multicultural education". In an effort to clarify the conversation about the topic, they developed a taxonomy of the diverse ways the term was used. The authors warn their readers that they overtly advocate a critical multicultural position and that readers should take this into account as they consider their taxonomy.

James Banks, a lifetime leader in multicultural education and a former president of both the National Council for the Social Studies and the American Educational Research Association, describes the balancing forces in "Citizenship education must be transformed in the 21st century" (4th. Edition, 2008) because of the deepening racial, ethnic, cultural, language and religious diversity in nation-states around the world. Citizens in a diverse democratic society should be able to maintain attachments to their cultural communities as well as participate effectively in the shared national culture.

Unity without diversity results in cultural repression and hegemony. Diversity without unity leads to Balkanization and the fracturing of the nation-state. Diversity and unity should coexist in a delicate balance in democratic multicultural nation-states." Planning curriculum for schools in a multicultural democracy involves making some value choices.

Schools are not neutral. The schools were established and funded to promote democracy and citizenship. A pro democracy position is not neutral; teachers should help schools promote diversity. The myth of school neutrality comes from a poor understanding of the philosophy of positivism. Rather than neutrality, schools should plan and teach cooperation, mutual respect, the dignity of individuals and related democratic values. Schools, particularly integrated schools, provide a rich site where students can meet one another, learn to work together, and be deliberative about decision making. In addition to democratic values, deliberative strategies and teaching decision making provide core procedures for multicultural education.

According to some views, if one wants to alienate and further fragment the communication and rapport between ethnic groups, implement multicultural education. As stated by Bennett (1995), "to dwell on cultural differences is to foster negative prejudices and stereotypes, and that is human nature to view those who are different as inferior" (p.29). Thus, multicultural education will enhance feelings of being atypical. Schools in Eropa may see multicultural education as a way to "color blind" their students to differences. Administrators may view the "color blind" approach as a gate keeper that assures equal treatment and justice for all students and as a way to facilitate compatibility and sameness of all cultures. A common statement from this line of thinking is, 'we are more alike than different'. We should focus on the similarities and not the differences to achieve greater equanimity among the races.

Ethnicity is breaking up many nations. If one looks at the former Soviet Union, India, Yugoslavia, and Ethiopia, all countries are in some type of crisis. Closer to home, one observes the divisiveness of the Rodney King and O.J. Simpson trials in our country, we can see how focusing on race and multiculturalism may lead to a further divisiveness between the races in America. Over time, multicultural education may have unplanned for and undesired consequences. For example, multicultural education rejects the historic American goals of assimilation and integration of ethnic cultures into the majority culture. Hence, the perception may result that America is a country of distinct ethnic groups, as opposed to a more traditional view of the country that involves individuals making decisions for the good of the order (Schlesinger, 1991).

Multicultural education may increase the resentment encountered by students who feel that changes in school traditions, curriculum, and academic standards are not necessary to get along and respect students from ethnic minorities. Since many institutions resist change of any kind, passive resistance on the part of the administration may simulate acceptance of the tenants of Multicultural education. Of course, excepting the tenants of multicultural education should be avoided with enthusiasm and optimism.

The writer submits that multicultural education must have, as its crux, the below defining characteristics to achieve its purposes for students, teachers, parents, and administrators of the school system:

- a) a learning environment that supports positive interracial contact;
- b) a multicultural curriculum;
- c) positive teacher expectations;
- d) administrative support; and,
- e) teacher training workshops (Bennett, 1995).

If one of the features is absent, frustration and heightened resentment may occur as backlash behaviors multiply.

The effects of a positive multicultural climate may manifest in a number of ways, such as:

- a) diminished pockets of segregation among student body;
- b) less racial tension in the schools;
- c) increased ethnic minority retention and classroom performance; and,
- d) inclusion of a multicultural curriculum.

In short, the multicultural educational environment should not be a microcosm of our present American society, with regard to issues of diversity and tolerance. Many factors determine a successful multicultural atmosphere, but the features as outlined above may be important indications of success.

A multicultural curriculum should be considered for several reasons:

- a) provides alternative points of view relative to information already taught in most educational systems;

- b) provides ethnic minorities with a sense of being inclusive in history, science etc.; and,
- c) decreases stereotypes, prejudice, bigotry, and racism in Europa, America and the world.

A significant demographic transformation is on the horizon for international schools. Educational institutions have been dictated too long by attitudes, values, beliefs, and value systems of one race and class of people. The future of our universe is demanding a positive change for all (Hilliard & Pine, 1990).

Administrative support for multicultural education is critical. How can a house stand if the foundation is fragile. Multicultural education will be as successful as commitment to it by school administrators. Regardless of the level of commitment (local, state, and/or national), programs initiated under the guise of multiculturalism must receive reinforcement from administrators who are accountable for the success of established multicultural initiatives. In conclusion, a key factor in any proposed multicultural initiative is curriculum development.

Bibliography:

1. BENNETT, C. *Comprehensive multicultural education: Theory and practice* (3rd ed.). Massachusetts: Allen & Bacon. 1995.
2. BOUDON, R. and BOURRICAUD, F. Culturalism and culture. In: *A critical dictionary of sociology* / Trans. P.Hamilton. University of Chicago Press, 2010.
3. CAMPBELL, D. *Choosing Democracy: a Practical Guide to Multicultural Education*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2010, p.340-341. ISBN 978-0-13-503481-1
4. KINCHELOE, J. and SHIRLEY, S. *Changing Multiculturalism*. London: Open University Press, 1997.
5. NADANER, D. The art teacher as cultural mediator. In: *Journal of multi-cultural and cross-cultural research in art education*, 1999, vol.3, no.1, p.51.

Prezentat la 17.09.2014