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EDUCATING TEACHERS FOR INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

Abstract

The paper begins with a short overview of the development of intercultural education and proposes a definition of interculturality in education as a pedagogical principle that guides the entire process of planning, implementing, and evaluating education at the systemic, curricular, school, and classroom levels to enable recognition and empowerment of all minority groups. Measures appropriate for the different levels are discussed. The paper concludes with an overview on teacher education for the implementation of the principle of interculturality and proposes a framework model of such an educational plan.

Introduction

Discussions on intercultural or multicultural issues in education have been taking place in educational theory and practice since at least the 1960s. After first focusing on ethnic revitalization movements in the U.S.A., Canada, and Australia, they were soon applied to the migration processes in Europe. After World War II Europe experienced many waves of economic migration. On one side migrants from colonial nations began arriving, and on the other were the migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe moving to Western and Northern Europe; all were looking for better lives and working conditions (Banks, 2009). What triggered discussions and the development of a number of paradigms of intercultural¹ education, was however not only the mere fact of migration, a phenomenon that is as old as human race itself.

There are at least two key factors that influenced its emergence in second half of the twentieth century. The first was the adoption of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), which states that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (Article 2). Moreover, according to the Declaration (Article 18) everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. Second, studies began to reveal that – in spite of greater formal equality – minority students or students with immigrant backgrounds did not actually have the same equality of educational opportunity as majority populations. Their educational achievements were also considerably lower, so educational theory began to seek an explanation and develop educational models that would bring about better outcomes for everybody.

¹ In the U.S.A. and other Anglophone countries the term multicultural is usually used, while in Continental Europe the term intercultural prevails.

The conceptualization of intercultural education

The development of intercultural education is abundantly documented (Auernheimer, 1997; Banks, 2009; Cushner, 1998; Diehm & Radtke, 1999; Figueroa, 1998; Grant & Portera, 2011; McCarthy, 1995; Seeberg et al., 1988; Sleeter & Grant, 1987, 2006, etc.), revealing a multitude of theoretical views and practical models. To simplify only a little, we can conclude that there are two primary global approaches to the issues of a multicultural student body. The first approach has been often called the assimilationist approach, and the second integrative or multi- or intercultural approach (Banks, 2009; Cushner, 1998; Diehm & Radtke, 1999; Troyna, 1993). In the U.S.A. the multicultural approach has soon developed, but it has never been monolithic. On the contrary, by 1987 Sleeter and Grant described five prevailing models of multicultural education (updated in 2006). They distinguish the following models: (1) teaching the exceptional and the culturally different, the main aim which is to prepare students to function in American society; the model did not leave the assimilationist perspective completely behind, but was inspirational for later models; (2) human relations, which strives to build better relationships among people of different cultural backgrounds, so as to reduce hostility and prejudice; it does not address the issue of power relations; (3) single-group study, which advocates comprehensive study of marginalized groups' history, experiences with oppression, and resistance; its main problems are that it leaves mainstream curriculum untouched and can promote separatism; (4) multicultural education, based on promoting values such as cultural diversity, respect for difference, human rights and social justice, and equal opportunities; the model is designed to include the entire student population, but has been criticized for not paying enough attention to structural inequalities; and (5) multicultural and social reconstructionist education, which Sleeter and Grant prefer, is grounded in the critique of modern culture and its unjust structure; in their view, education should empower students from different social groups experiencing discrimination to challenge the unjust status quo.

Germany was one of the first nations in Western Europe that reacted to the mass immigration. Already by the 1960s, the field of social pedagogy (*Sozial Pedagogik*) had established *Ausländer Pedagogik* ("foreigner pedagogy", see Diehm & Radtke, 1999; Faas, 2008). Foreigner pedagogy was based on assimilationist notions, and was focused on the migrant students who were perceived as handicapped by their poor command of the German language. Foreign pedagogy thus emphasized the teaching of the German language and other compensatory strategies targeted at various learning gaps. In the 1980s and 1990s, foreigner pedagogy underwent serious critique, and has since been gradually replaced by intercultural pedagogy (at least in theory, less so in practice). Intercultural pedagogy has brought about a complete change of focus: it addresses all students and defends the idea that citizens need to learn to live in a culturally diverse society. Moreover, minority identities have to be recognized and every student needs to be supported to fulfil her potential and aspirations. Critical pedagogues have also argued that intercultural pedagogy needs to address the power inequalities of the education system itself, which primarily involves implementing a multi-perspective and anti-bias curriculum and creating a democratic, pluralistic, inclusive school ethos. Similar stances have been

taken by some English authors, who have developed anti-racist education (Auernheimer, 1997; Faas, 2008; Troyna, 1993).

(American) critical multiculturalism, (English) anti-racist education, and (German) critical intercultural pedagogy share many common traits. Hence, intercultural education is not only about appreciating cultural richness, but also about a critical understanding of knowledge; students must be taught to question the very origins of knowledge and power relations embedded in it (Apple, 1992). Moreover, intercultural education does more than show respect for minority identities; it investigates the nature and role of identity in the contemporary era (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Similarly, Chen, Nimmo and Fraser (2009) propose the following aims to be pursued from preschool education forward: (1) to nurture the construction of a knowledgeable, confident identity as an individual and as a member of multiple cultural groups; (2) to promote comfortable, empathetic interactions with people from diverse backgrounds; (3) to foster each child's ability to critically think about bias and injustice; and (4) to cultivate each child's ability to stand up for herself or himself, and for others, in the face of bias and injustice. (Chen, Nimmo & Fraser, 2009, p. 101).

Based on these considerations, I propose interculturality in education be defined as a pedagogical principle that guides the entire process of planning, implementing, and evaluating education at the systemic, curricular, school, and classroom levels to enable recognition and empowerment of all minority groups. It is a principle that supports: (1) the improvement of minority students' learning outcomes; (2) better recognition of their identities; and (3) a common education based on the values of participation, and cooperation.

Measures supporting interculturality

The implementation of the principle of interculturality is very demanding since it requires both a systemic restructuring and a considerable change of perspective from any number of actors. It also opens up new dilemmas and pitfalls, and must be therefore done with utmost caution. In order to be successful it should be introduced at several levels; if any is left out the chances of success decline precipitously; in general pedagogy we know that the effectiveness of education depends on the unity of educational action and that the more the educational factors are harmonized, the more likely is success. A perfect unity, however, remains impossible, since contradictions are to a certain extent always inherent to educational aims (Ermenc, 2005; Schmidt, 1975). To illuminate the complexity of intercultural education, let us first touch upon some of the possible measures at the systemic and curriculum levels – the number and nature of these measures cannot be exactly defined, since they depend on specificities of each educational, social, and political context.

1. The introduction of multi-perspective and cultural responsive curricula. Curricula from which the cases of ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and prejudice are eradicated; curricula that present history, geography, literature etc. from multiple perspectives and by inclusion of minority and neglected voices; and curricula that are flexible enough to enable teachers to respond to characteristics of their students. Curricula are accompanied by textbooks and other learning materials that follow the same ideas and include also texts, pictures, and names that give minority students an opportunity to identify with them.

2. The reconceptualization of mother-tongue learning and the promotion of multilingualism. The language of instruction is not the mother tongue of all students. If this is not recognized, an exclusivist discourse can evolve.

3. The organization of intensive and long-lasting second language learning, with simultaneous systematic support for early inclusion of immigrant students into mainstream education.

4. Systemic support for teacher education that is based on interculturality in both the pre-certification and continuing professional education contexts.

5. Undertaking studies that investigate factors influencing low achievements of minority students and the evaluation of the success of intercultural interventions.

How should schools and teachers support the principle of interculturality?

Policymakers are responsible for the implementation of such system- and curriculum-related measures, which represent a base on which schools and teachers can build and without which their efforts are severely limited (Ermenc, 2007). In order to bring them to life however, a profound change of a school's ethos and pedagogical practices is required. Without teachers' readiness to change, interculturality will remain a purely paper tiger. Several scholars have proposed important measures that schools and teachers should take (Ermenc, 2010; Rutar, 2014; Vižintin, 2013).

1. Organizational measures: We have seen that intercultural education is not only about tackling the issues concerning newly arrived students from other countries. Schools, which welcome them on a regular basis, need to establish a sort of welcoming system including the provision of information booklets in several languages, interpreters (other students, local community members, etc.), intensive language courses, tutoring systems, and support mechanisms organized together with minority parents and minority societies.

2. Individualization and differentiation: A fundamental characteristic of every school that promotes an inclusive school ethos is its student-centeredness: individualized instruction and instruction in small groups is combined with whole-class instruction and common activities. Differentiation of students is however never long-lasting, and never functions as a means of segregation. The basic principle the school follows is to occasionally separate, but only for the purposes of bringing together in the end.

3. Intercultural and inclusive school ethos refers to giving voice to minority students: discussing ethnic relations in society, reflecting on the reasons for ethnic conflict, getting to know minorities' art, scientific achievements, etc. Inclusive schools also teach their students that heterogeneity is a normal state of humanity, that every person is in some way different from all others and that differences should be respected. Fundamentally, all people are the same in their human dignity and in their human needs.

4. Teachers' teamwork and teachers' responsibility: not only language teachers but all teachers are responsible both for the creation of an intercultural and inclusive school ethos and also for providing support to every single student.

5. Teachers' responsiveness and awareness of one's own prejudices: Teachers are only human and have prejudices and (positive or negative) stereotypes about their students. As teachers' prejudices and stereotypes may have a negative impact

on their rapport with students and thus also on students' learning achievements (Wiggan, 2007), it is crucial that teachers become aware of them and do everything in their power to eradicate them. Teachers need to pose themselves questions such as: "Do I respond when I notice that a student is pushed aside or ignored? Do I respond when I notice that a student does not understand the lesson? Do I expect too little from this student (is he/she capable of more)? Do I really respect and treat all my students equally? What will I do about it?"

Educating the teachers

Bringing the principle of interculturality to life is certainly not an easy and straightforward task. One of the crucial conditions that must be fulfilled is appropriately-educated teaching staff, but the definition of "appropriate" is hardly self-evident. Research carried out in Slovenia over the last decade (Ermenc, 2004; Peček & Lesar, 2006; Rutar, 2014; Vižintin, 2013) shows that teachers often believe that what they need is some extra knowledge on teaching methodologies and more support from auxiliary staff, who can help accommodate new coming students with poor command of the language of instruction. The findings of those studies, however, show that what the teachers may need even more is a change in their own attitudes: they need to take responsibility for all their students' achievements and for their recognition. There is no doubt that they need to be supported by systemic, organizational, and curricular measures, but they also should be aware that they have a crucial role to play and a solemn responsibility to uphold.

I propose that teacher education for the implementation of the principle of interculturality be conceptualized around three broad aims: informative aims, formative aims, and aims related to professional characteristics.

1) Informative aims (or, "Knowing What") refer to knowledge that teachers need to have: they need to have some basic knowledge of migration theory (causes of migration), anthropology (cultural relativism), social psychology (identity formation in primary and secondary socialization), identity politics (minority empowerment), postmodern views on truth, values and identity, and multilingualism.

2) Formative aims (or, "Knowing How") refer to teachers' abilities to make use of different didactic approaches and strategies, to deploy intercultural communication skills, and to communicate effectively with culturally diverse parents. They also include teachers' ability to counteract prejudice-based bullying. Chen, Nimmo and Fraser (2009) point out that teachers must know how to draw on students' culture and how to capitalize on students' prior knowledge.

3) Professional attitude (or, "Knowing Why"): Teachers are not always aware that their responsibility is not only knowing the subject they teach and the didactic methods they employ, but that they are also responsible for displaying a professional attitude. From the intercultural education point of view, it is crucial that teachers are willing to re-examine their own feelings toward minority students and different cultures critically and investigate how their attitudes might influence their practice. As teachers, they are partly but crucially responsible for every student's progress and well-being. Nieto (1999) stressed that teachers should also be curious and eager to learn about the students, and should see their students as individuals, not just as part of the group.

Conclusion

Achieving such ambitious goals demands changes on the cognitive level, of course, but also on the affective and conative levels: teachers need not only to possess new information and knowledge (cognitive level), but also to be aware of their emotional interpretation of information and knowledge they have gained and understood (affective level). Moreover, they need to be willing to act on what they know (conative level). Huitt and Cain define conation as follows:

Conation refers to the connection of knowledge and affect to behavior and is associated with the issue of “why”. It is the personal, intentional, planful, deliberate, goal-oriented, or striving component of motivation, the proactive (as opposed to reactive or habitual) aspect of behavior [...] Atman (1987) defined conation as “vectored energy: i.e., personal energy that has both direction and magnitude” (p. 15). It is closely associated with the concepts of intrinsic motivation, volition, agency, self-direction, and self-regulation (2005, p. 1).

Such complex aims cannot be achieved with one quick fix. Intercultural teacher education should begin at the undergraduate level, when teachers-to-be gain the basic subject, pedagogical and psychological knowledge and insight. At that level, the focus can mostly be on cognitive levels, on “knowing what”. Later on, intercultural teacher education should become a part of wider professional teacher development, involving the attendance at seminars and workshops, where more emphasis is usually given to the improvement of teachers’ expertise and where more issues related to affective and conative levels begin to be raised. To be most successful, however, the affective and conative levels can be influenced at the school level by setting up a collaborative and externally supported professional development model. Such a model may include teachers’ teamwork, formative peer observation, and cooperation in different projects with external experts and researchers.

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