

**Viola B. Georgi**

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## **What is multi/intercultural education?**

If we want to talk about school and education in immigration societies, we need to address the simple question: What are multicultural and intercultural education?

As you all know: Simple questions do not necessarily entail simple answers. The definitions of “mc education” – as used in the classical immigration countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, also in the UK – or “intercultural education” – as used more often in Europe – vary.

Meanwhile these definitions have become even more diversified: New approaches – brought forward in different countries and regional contexts – claim the need of expanding the cultural frame of MCE to including different forms of diversity, multiple identities and new concepts of citizenship: for example “cosmopolitan” or “global citizenship”. These developments sometimes make it difficult to grasp the essence of ICE or even produces confusion.

Today, I deliberately put the terms intercultural and multicultural education together – and use them synonymously –, because I think they are too often wrongfully separated from each other:

After all, the educational concepts developed under both headlines often do differ very little in their theoretical architecture or in their practical implementation. So I am taking the stand of reunifying transatlantic and European approaches towards education in immigration societies: being aware of historical, cultural and political peculiarities of different social environments involved – and knowing that this might be risk taking at some points.

We all have experienced that multicultural and intercultural education mean different things to different people. However, the differences – and that is the point I would like to make here – are not as great, confusing, or contradictory as some critics claim. Many of these differences are more semantic than substantial.

The field of intercultural education includes educational scholars, researchers, and practitioners from a wide variety of personal, professional and academic backgrounds. People like us – united at this conference. So it no surprise that

such a highly diverse and interdisciplinary group of advocates departs from different points of reference in discussing diversity and cultural pluralism.

However, all conceptions of multicultural and intercultural education share a desire to make cultural pluralism and societal diversity integral parts of the educational process.

To underpin this theoretically, I would like to introduce some of the most frequently used definitions of multicultural and intercultural education from the US, Canada, the UK and Germany.

Let me give some examples:

The Canadian scholar:

- Institutionalizing a philosophy of cultural pluralism within the educational system that is grounded in principles of equality, mutual respect, acceptance and understanding, and moral commitment to social justice (Brentice Baptiste, 1979)

The British scholar:

- An education free of inherited biases, with freedom to explore other perspectives and cultures, inspired by the goal of making children sensitive to the plurality of the ways of life, different modes of analyzing experiences and ideas, and ways of looking at history found throughout the world (Bhikhu Parekh, 1986, pp. 2627)

The American scholar:

- An approach to teaching and learning based upon democratic values that foster cultural pluralism; in its most comprehensive form, it is a commitment to achieving educational equality, developing curricula that builds understanding about ethnic groups, and combating oppressive practices (Milton Bennett, 1990)

James A. Banks: also an American scholar

- A type of education that is concerned with various groups in (...) society that are victims of discrimination and assaults because of their unique cultural characteristics (ethnic, racial, linguistic, gender, etc.); it includes studying such key concepts as prejudice, identity, conflicts, and alienation, and modifying school practices and policies to reflect an appreciation for ethnic diversity. Multicultural education deals with ideas, reforms and programs aiming at providing equitable learning

opportunities for students of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds in a socially just society. (James A. Banks 2004)

The American scholar:

- Comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students that challenges all forms of discrimination, permeates instruction and interpersonal relations in the classroom, and advances the democratic principles of social justice (Sonia Nieto, 1992)

The German scholar:

Interkulturelle Pädagogik muß sich an zwei Leitmotiven orientieren: Erstens am Motiv der **Gleichheit** - Gleichheit der Rechte, Gleichheit der Bildungs- und Sozialchancen, zweitens am Motiv der **Anerkennung**. Dies meint die Anerkennung von Lebensformen, kulturellen Symbolen, Überzeugungen, die für das Selbstverständnis anderer bedeutsam sind. Pädagogik kann nicht Gleichheit herstellen, aber sie kann und muss Ungleichheit, d. h. auch "strukturellen Rassismus" bewusst machen. (...) (Georg Auernheimer, 2003, S.163ff)

These various definitions – as you will have noticed – do not simply celebrate diversity – but articulate standards of what I would call: “a critical multiculturalism in education”. A critical multiculturalism in education is not confined to analyzing and facilitating classroom interaction between students from different backgrounds, but also challenges power structures and the habits of the respective dominant societal groups whose norms are reflected in the educational institutions.

- The authors – I have quoted – state that, at best, multicultural education is a philosophy, a methodology for educational reform.
- The authors point out that ICE is about recognition, equal opportunity and social justice.

- They agree that the content of multicultural education programs should include ethnic identities, cultural pluralism, unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, and other socio-political problems stemming from long histories of oppression or neglected histories of immigration.
- They are very aware of the fact that multicultural education has implications for decision-making that will affect operations at all levels of education, including instruction, administration, governance, counselling, program planning, performance appraisal, and school climate. Thus, all stakeholders involved must play an active role in implementing multicultural education. To implement multicultural education fully, fundamental changes will need to be made in the conception, organization, and execution of the educational process. These changes require modifications in educational systems that have mostly been governed within a monocultural and also monolingual orientation, based on Eurocentric, middle class cultural norms.

### **So, what does Intercultural Education demand from school?**

The school's role as an agent of intercultural education is double: towards minority groups and cultures and towards majority groups and cultures.

Intercultural education demands from the school an important process of opening and renewal, matching philosophy, attitudes, staff and curricula to the reality of plural immigration societies.

The American scholar Banks (1999) lists eight multicultural benchmarks for schools to utilize in order to maintain an effective multicultural school

According to Banks the following should be in place (p. 106):

1. A multicultural education **policy statement** sanctions and supports diversity.
2. The **staff** has positive attitudes and expectations toward diverse students.
3. The school **staff** reflects ethnic and cultural diversity.
4. The **curriculum** is transformational and action-focused and reflects diversity.
5. **Parent participation** provides an important context for teaching and a link with student personal/cultural knowledge.
6. **Teaching strategies** are constructivist, personalized, empowering, and participatory.
7. **Teaching materials** present diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural perspectives on events, concepts, and issues.

8. Each of these 7 program component is monitored on a continuing basis.

### **Major Goals of Multicultural Education: Why should it be useful to students?**

The expected outcomes of Intercultural education are embedded in its definitions, justification, and assumptions and they exhibit some clearly discernible patterns. While specific goals and related objectives are quite numerous, and vary according to contextual factors such as school settings, audiences, timing, purposes, and perspectives, they fall into some general clusters: I will briefly outline four of these clusters:

1. ethnic and cultural literacy
2. personal development
3. intercultural competence
4. political literacy, empowerment and societal reform

**Let me briefly sketch these aspects:**

#### **1. Cluster: MCE develops Ethnic and Cultural Literacy**

One of the primary and persistent reasons for MCE to include cultural pluralism in school programs is to correct what advocates call "sins of omission and commission." First, we must provide students with information about the history and contributions of groups who traditionally have been excluded from instructional materials and curricula; and second, we must replace the distorted and biased images of those groups that were included in the curricula with more accurate and significant information. Transmitting knowledge about ethnic pluralism is a necessary foundation for respecting and valuing diversity, both nationally and internationally.

#### **2. Cluster: MCE helps developing Intercultural Competence**

It is imperative that students learn how to interact with and understand people who are different from themselves. Multicultural education can ease these

tensions by teaching skills in cross-cultural communication, interpersonal relations, perspective taking, understanding alternative points of view and frames of reference, and analyzing how cultural conditions affect values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

### **3. Cluster: MCE serves the Personal Development**

MCE supports students to develop greater self-understanding and positive self concepts. Students who feel recognized and valued are likely to be more open and receptive to interaction with others and to respect differences. This argument is further justified by claims made about the reciprocal relationship between self-concept, academic achievement, ethnicity, culture, and individual identity.

### **4. Cluster: MCE provides political literacy, empowers individuals for Societal Reform**

The ultimate goal of multicultural education is to begin a process of change in schools that will ultimately extend to society. This is hoped to be accomplished by cultivating in students attitudes, values, habits, and skills so that they can become social change agents who are committed to reforming society in order to eradicate disparities in opportunities and are willing to act upon this commitment. To do so, they need to improve their knowledge of minority issues as well as develop decision-making abilities, social action skills, leadership capabilities, a sense of political efficacy, and a moral commitment to human dignity and equality (Banks, 1991b; NCSS, 1992). That is – as Banks puts it – they not only need to understand and appreciate that ethnicity and pluralism are salient features of human life, but also how to translate this knowledge into decisions and actions related to key socio-political issues, events, concerns, and situations.

This goal and related skill development are designed to make society more egalitarian and more accepting of cultural pluralism. They also are intended to ensure that societal groups that traditionally have been victimized and excluded will become full fledged participants at all levels of society, with all of the attendant rights, privileges, and responsibilities.

In that sense ICE is citizenship education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **To come to an end:**

Against all the odds – in times of declaring MC as dead - I would like to conclude:

ICE education is not primarily about “celebrating” diversity – as it is often reduced to by its critics – but mainly a political take on the fact that we live in societies which are still characterized by a lack of democracy when looking at the participation of specific groups, a lack of recognition, a lack of equity and a lack of social justice.

Therefore MCE is a political project:

It is part and parcel of a “politics of recognition”. (Charles Taylor).

## **For MCE aims at:**

preparing ALL students for the realities of living in a pluralistic world.

It flanks integration processes in immigration societies

It aims at recognizing and accepting diversity as a fundamental fact (and right) and salient feature in human life and modern societies.

It aims at educational, societal and political transformation through challenging discriminatory structures, practices and institutions of education

Altogether ICE may provide the ground for more equity, more inclusion and more democracy.

Looking at these superordinated objectives of ICE and MCE it seems that we have only started to understand the scope of critical multiculturalism. – A multiculturalism that goes far beyond folkloristic school fairs and diversity activities in the classroom.

May this conference empower us to fully embrace the potential and the promise of Multicultural and Intercultural Education.