

Intercultural Education – a Priority of Education Policies

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1. Intercultural Education

Coping with diversity and complexity is not to be understood solely as placing people in close proximity to each other or as a passive contemplation of the richness of our living world. To avoid discrimination, exclusion and conflicts, people must learn to interact on the basis of human rights principles.

In our everyday wording, the distinction between multiculturalism and interculturalism is not always clear. Both are associated with heavily symbolic ideas such as identities, belonging, affiliation or cultural particularism. We are talking about two distinct processes, however.¹ **Multiculturalism** is more a descriptive term and refers to the natural state of society that cannot but be diverse, namely multilingual, multiethnic, multireligious, etc. This particular meaning stresses the comparative dimension, the co-existence of different entities that may manifest themselves as such in a common public sphere (e.g. in a multicultural society).

Interculturalism, on the other hand, emphasises the interactive dimension and the capacity of entities to build common projects, to assume shared responsibilities and to create common identities. According to Fennes and Hapgood², interculturalism is basically a creative process:

"Intercultural learning is more than an encounter with another culture and is more than culture shock. Intercultural learning is based on the assumption that the fear of the foreign is not a natural destiny and that cultural development has always been a result of an encounter of different cultures. The prefix inter suggests that this fear and the historical barriers can be overcome. It also suggests a relationship and exchange between cultures. But, even more, intercultural learning is based on the readiness to make the encounter with other cultures

¹ The differences are valid especially in a European context. In the USA, Canada and Australia, the term "intercultural" is rarely used. "Multicultural" is common for both the static situation (diversity) and the interaction resulting from interpersonal encounters (the dynamic or intercultural dimension).

² H.Fennes, K. Hapgood, *Intercultural Learning in the Classroom. Crossing Borders*, London, Cassel, 1997, pp. 45; 47.

productive, to gain greater awareness of one's own culture, to be able to relativize one's own culture and to explore new ways of coexistence and cooperation with other cultures... This is not only a body of knowledge and skills (e.g. how to communicate through both verbal and non-verbal language, how to greet, how to eat) but also a state of mind that develops a greater capacity for tolerance and ambiguity, an openness to different values and behaviours. It does not always imply accepting and taking on different values as one's own, but acquiring the flexibility of seeing them as they are in the context of another cultural filter, not through one's own ethnocentred frame."

In other words, interculturalism means a better understanding of one's own culture in the light of various reference systems, in addition to knowledge about other cultures.

An example will help us to acquire a clearer understanding of the differences. It has to do with the similitude between interculturalism and interdisciplinarity. Mono-disciplinary approaches, just like mono-cultural situations, are very rare. Knowledge is essentially specialised and is divided into autonomous disciplines. The disciplines may remain independent or co-exist within the same academic department (e.g. the political sciences). The multi-disciplinary setting may, however, encourage inter-disciplinary research, exchanges of methods and concepts, common explanatory frames and joint applications. It is what Piaget³ called "structural interdisciplinarity", a process of cross-disciplinary interaction of mental schemes leading to new conceptual frameworks or even new disciplinary identities (e.g. environmental sciences, artificial intelligence or computer sciences).

Such interactions take place in all the areas of culture. Through exchanges, common activities, transfers and cross-fertilisation, the parties undergo a transformation and emerge as new collective identities or other cultural entities. This way, according to Pieterse⁴, globalization is nothing but a continuous "cultural hybridisation".

According to Rey⁵, interculturalism is not a given situation but something to be acquired. It is built on three levels:

- at the level of facts and daily encounters;
- at the level of images and representations;
- at the level of individual and social identities.

Many of these interactions occur spontaneously, through intercultural encounters. In the past two decades, however, intercultural education (IE) has become a major **policy goal**. The

³ J.Piaget, L'épistémologie des relations interdisciplinaires. In: *L'interdisciplinarité*, Paris, OCDE, 1972, p. 131-144.

⁴ J.N. Pieterse, Globalization as Hybridisation. *International Sociology*, 1994, vol. 9, no.2, pp. 161 – 184.

⁵ M. Rey, Between "Memory and History. A Word about Intercultural Education", *European Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 1996, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 5-6.

new diversity sources in Europe (e.g. massive human migrations in the '90s, increased work mobility, emergence of new minorities, and openness to global networks) has made IE appear more and more often on education policy agendas. This requires systematic action and adequate support.

Initially, the phrase “intercultural education” was used in North America to designate the “cross-cultural” and “intercultural” training of candidates for studies or work abroad⁶. Subsequently, interest in IE extended considerably especially in connection with cultural diversity, integration and assimilation processes.

The Council of Europe was and remains the main promoter of IE as a policy issue. We might even say, alongside Perotti⁷ and Leclercq⁸, that the evolution of IE contents is actually the expression of the evolution of education policies within the Council of Europe.

2. We can actually outline the following stages:

- **IE as a corollary of migrants' education (in the '70s and '80s)**

Interest in IE emerged not in the academic environment, but was the product of decision-makers confronted with a new European issue: education for the migrant population. Without any explicit reference to IE, the various activities undertaken in the '70s sought new solutions to educate migrants' children e.g. the “experimental classes” (1972 – 1984). In this compensation and integration-oriented programme, the children of migrant families were called “culturally different” instead of the initial “culturally handicapped”.

As a principle of education policies, IE was formulated for the very first time in 1983, at the 13th Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education. To give it a human rights perspective, the CoE launched the project on “Education and Cultural Development of Migrants” (also known as Project no. 7).

- **IE and minority rights (the '90s)**

In the '90s the prevailing paradigm of education policies in the CoE was that of minority rights. In the wake of the political changes of 1989 (Central and Eastern Europe) and 1991 (former USSR and ex-Yugoslavia) new minorities and national states emerged.

Just like the end of World War I witnessed the dissolution of the large multinational empires, the former majority populations became minorities in some of the new national states. Having been granted political liberties, minorities claimed their rights. Problems once

⁶ D. Hoopes, *Intercultural Communication Concepts and the Psychology of Intercultural Experience*. In: M. Pusch (ed.) *Multicultural Education. A Cross-cultural Training Approach*, Yarmouth, Maine, Intercultural Press, 1979, p.10.

⁷ A.Perotti, *Plaidoyer pour l'interculturel*, Strasbourg, Editions du Conseil de l'Europe, 1994.

⁸ J.M.Leclercq, *Figures de l'interculturel dans l'éducation*, Strasbourg, Editions du Conseil de l'Europe, 2002.

carefully camouflaged rose to the surface (e.g. issues related to Roma/gypsies, languages and cultures threatened with extinction as well as claims for collective rights).

At a political level, European countries adopted the Framework Convention of Minority Rights (1993). In the same period, CoE carried out the vast programme entitled “Democracy, Human Rights, Minorities: Educational and Cultural Aspects”. Together with the various specific projects (e.g. those dedicated to languages, history teaching, citizenship education, the European dimension and higher education), the integrated programme brought new insights on IE, e.g. the issues of cultural rights, cultural communities (as an alternative to the sensitive term minority) and multiple identities.

- **IE and learning to live together (after 2000)**

Starting with the late ‘90s, IE took on a broader significance, in the perspective of learning to live together. IE no longer applied strictly to relationships between the recipient population and the migrant groups or between the dominant culture and the minority culture.

It is seen as mundane, valid for all situations, all social and cultural environments, all ages and types of populations. In this broader sense, IE permeates the whole society and involves all categories of learners. Actually, IE means preparing children and young people, as well as adults, to learn to live together in a multicultural society.

The premises of this broader perspective were laid by CoE projects in the period 1997-2003. The new project on “Intercultural Education and the Challenge of Religious Diversity and Dialogue” launched in 2002, added the religious dimension of IE (Cf. Batelaan, 2003).

3. In the framework of the Athens Ministerial Conference, IE is meant to become an overall policy goal. In more concrete terms, this broader view will eventually inspire the following courses of action:

3.1. Learning from differences

As we have seen, IE is a creative process. Its aim is not just to preserve but also to enrich diversity and multiculturalism with the help of new learning experiences. Similar to the case of structural interdisciplinarity, the parties influence one another to such an extent that they modify their identities and behaviours.

Of the in-depth research carried out on intercultural dynamism, two studies in particular attracted our attention. The first is Bennett’s⁹ “differentiation” theory. In his opinion, cultural development implies a progressive “differentiation” process: cultural differences lead to the emergence of new differences which in turn become the source of further cultural

⁹ M.J. Bennett, Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. In: M. R. Paige (ed.), *Education for the Intercultural Experience*, Yarmouth, Maine, Intercultural Press, 1993, p. 29.

enrichments. Consequently, intercultural education must focus on a mutual understanding of differences, through “**intercultural sensitivity**”.

The second, more complex approach is Bourdieu’s¹⁰ theory of **cultural capital**. Human social activity, says Bourdieu, occurs in a cultural space organized by “fields”. Within each field, agents are relationally defined and hierarchically positioned, the end-result being a power configuration or a “cultural capital”. According to Bourdieu¹¹, there are three forms of cultural capital:

- styles, manners, modes of bearing, interaction and expression, as well as cultural preferences and affinities;
- things produced and appropriated, designated as “culture” (e.g. literature, music, art, museums, libraries, historical sites, etc.);
- academic qualifications that credential recipients' cultural distinction.

The distinctions embedded in the cultural capital (i.e. the cultural configuration and symbolic power distribution within a society) are absolutely arbitrary. They derive neither from the intrinsic features of the signs themselves, nor from universal principles but from the “cultural order” of our societies. To prevent cultural capital from reproducing itself from one generation to the next, it would be advisable to establish symbolic distinctions. Even though Bourdieu does not use the phrase IE, the idea is to multiply the “cultural producers” and re-distribute the “symbolic authority”, in other words, to re-define or replace existing symbolic boundaries and identities (e.g. majority vs. minority, indigenous vs. foreign cultures, the North-South cleavages, the Old and the New Europe, etc.) with a more dynamic and global perspective. Practically, this means a shift from Eurocentrism to intercultural sensitivity. It allows the reproduction of existing cultural models as well as the creation of new ones.

The authors who have been focusing on this topic¹² have shown that learning from differences implies three principles:

- **focus on differences**, not on common features which means openness towards the foreign and unknown;
- **cultural relativism**, this is to say equality of cultures; it implies that the values and norms of one culture cannot be used to judge other cultures;
- **reciprocity**, which means exchanges, interaction and mutual trust.

¹⁰ P. Bourdieu, *La distinction*, Paris, Ed. de Minuit, 1979.

¹¹ P. Bourdieu, The Forms of Capital. In: J. Richardson (ed.), *The Handbook of Theory and Research in the Sociology of Education*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1986, pp. 241-258.

¹² M. Abdallah-Preteuille, *Vers une pédagogie interculturelle*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1990, 2^e ed.; C. Camileri, « Les conditions structurelles de l’interculturel », *Revue Française de Pédagogie*, 1993, no. 103, pp. 43-50; Fennes and Hapgood, *op. cit.*

Alix¹³ summarizes the above principles by means of what he calls “**dialogic learning**”. It is a dynamic process of confrontation with the foreign, comparison with other cultures, negotiation of symbols, contrastive understanding of one’s own culture, co-operation across cultural boundaries.

The sources of cultural differences can vary widely. All attempts to make an inventory have fallen short of the aim providing mere general tendencies. The most well-known international study¹⁴ on **cultural differences**, for example, is itself questionable because the data were collected in the context of established national cultures. To be precise, Hofstede analysed the way in which the core organisational culture of a supranational company (IBM) can be biased by the cultural specificities of the countries where it is implemented. In this sense, Hofstede has identified five areas of comparison, corresponding to the basic problems of any type of society:

- the relation to authority (power distance);
- the relationship between the individual and the group (individualism vs. collectivism);
- the social implications of having been born male or female (masculinity vs. femininity);
- the ways of dealing with uncertainty and conflicts;
- the time orientation.

Learning from differences is a key issue of IE. It implies, on the one hand, a systematic exposure to different cultures and, on the other hand, a re-discovery of one’s own culture as a result of intercultural experiences. Understanding cultural differences is therefore not a source of frustration or prejudice. On the contrary, it shows that any culture has its limits which can be overcome only through openness and interaction.

3.2. Learning from controversies and conflicts

Intercultural education is not always a smooth and harmonious process. In a similar manner to any interpersonal encounter, it may engender tensions, transactions, pressure, frustration, opposition, even cultural clashes. Naturally, any situation of divergence, contradiction or incompatibility of goals may generate **conflicts** such as conflicts of interest, moral conflicts or intergeneration conflicts. As Galtung¹⁵ points out, the key issue is not to avoid the conflict as this is an inherent outcome of diversity, but to prevent the settling of a conflict through **violence**, in other words by force and aggression.

¹³ Apud: Fennes and Hapgood, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁴ G. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organisations. Software of the Mind*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1991.

¹⁵ J. Galtung, *Rethinking Conflict: the Cultural Approach*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 2002, p. 5.

The boundaries have always been culturally justified by collective identities, such as nationality, ethnicity or religious beliefs. Since the “late capitalism” or “modernity”¹⁶ era, these invisible borders have been challenged by massive transnational movements of people, ideas, values and know-how. In our network societies the advent of these phenomena has increased the occurrence of conflicts as an expression of pluralism. It was no mere coincidence that IE emerged as an education policy option in the last decades of the 20th century when the old divisive practices were disrupted. In addition to its instrumental value *per se* (exchanges and cultural enrichment), IE came to be perceived as a means to prevent and manage conflicts in everyday life.

The legal and political instrument that made this consensual approach possible is the clause of **mutual limitation of human rights**. Each person, cultural group or community is entitled to rights and liberties which must not however restrict other people’s rights and liberties. This mutual limitation of rights discourages the establishment of cultural domination, discrimination or assimilation practices. In this sense, Gutman and Thomson¹⁷ refer to the **principle of reciprocity** as the foundation of deliberative democracy. Apart from mere tolerance (people agree to disagree), reciprocity implies maintaining the moral community despite differences.

Understanding controversies and settling conflicts are a major source of intercultural learning. In the particular context of the present study, we take into account the following circumstances:

3.3. Multiperspectivity

The multiple perspective approach is an indispensable condition of pluralism. In the late ‘90s, the Council introduced multiperspectivity in history teaching. To be precise, national and event-centred history textbooks were replaced with intercultural and theme-centred approaches to European history. The method allowed a pluralist view of controversial and sensitive issues based on dialogue, negotiation and consensus seeking.

Multiperspectivity was also used in other areas such as language policies, citizenship education and the European dimension. In the future, it is essential not only to continue to extend these approaches but also to substantiate the conceptual aspects from an intercultural learning point of view.

¹⁶ A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1992.

¹⁷ A. Gutman, D. Thomson, *Democracy and Disagreement. Why Moral Conflict Cannot be Avoided in Politics and What Should be Done about it*, Cambridge, The Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1996, pp. 79-80.

3.4. Remembrance and reconciliation

Despite visible progress (e.g. in Northern Ireland and Macedonia) there is still much to be done in terms of reconciliation in Europe. Especially in post-war areas, IE represents an integral part of reconciliation and peace-keeping processes.

Another important dimension of IE is that of consciously assuming the past. In a manner very similar to psychoanalysis, the errors of the past must be made known, explained to and understood by the new generations¹⁸. Only thus will it be possible to avoid and combat a repetition of the painful atrocities of our common history (the Holocaust, totalitarianisms, ethnical cleansing).

4. Conflict management

Learning to live in disagreement is one way of achieving a peaceful resolution of inherent everyday conflicts. Differences of opinion or behaviours are not in themselves negative; they become reprehensible the moment they degenerate into cultural clashes or violent confrontations or in case they are reclaimed politically or ideologically, to justify power games or antagonistic positions.

According to Galtung (op. cit., p.9), conflict prevention primarily requires depolarizing social and mental structures, this is to say intercultural education. With this end in view, he pleads for a consensual method involving a step-by-step learning process:

- identify the goals of all parties;
- distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate goals;
- bridge, go beyond, transcend the incompatibility among legitimate goals;
- peacebuilding, violence reduction, and reconciliation.

In actual fact, the “peace-building” schemes follow a reverse order, incompatible with a sustainable conflict resolution:

“Unfortunately, governments have a tendency to do this in the opposite order, enforcing a cease-fire (« peace enforcement » as they call it, with decommissioning of arms), organizing « peacebuilding » at the top around a conference table, arriving at an « agreement » with no organic base. No party will hand over all their arms with an image of a solution to inspire optimism, hope, and mobilize for peace.” (Galtung, 2002, p. 10)

Conflict management has also become a teaching method, in both schools and universities. For example, Johnson and Johnson¹⁹ introduced “constructive conflict management” in schools, combining three interrelated procedures, namely co-operative

¹⁸ J. Gundara, *Interculturalism, Education and Inclusion*, London, Paul Chapman Publishing, 2000, p. 136.

¹⁹ D.W.Johnson, R. Johnson, *Teaching Students to be Peacemakers*, Edina, Mn., Interaction Book Co., 1995.

learning, conflict resolution and peer mediation, academic controversy. Broadly speaking, the method follows the steps Galtung recommended for any conflict resolution process.

5. Religious dialogue

The issue of religious education is one of the most controversial. On the one hand, some people consider that the introduction of religion in school without adequate preparation runs the risk of opening Pandora's box. Others, on the other hand, say that it is an indisputable reality, which the school cannot ignore. To prove it, in almost all European education systems religious education is present in the formal curricula²⁰.

The new CoE project dedicated to "Religious Dialogue and Diversity" proposes to clarify the issue from the perspective of intercultural education. The religious dimension is perceived as a major element of diversity which intercultural learning must take into account.

From the point of view of education policies, says Milot²¹, there are two options²²:

- The first is the **confessional approach**, which, even if explicitly in favour of differences, inevitably leads to segmentation (prevailing view of a sole religion, to which the family belongs). School takes place in a mono-cultural space, as an extension of the culture of origin. This mono-religious education can be detrimental to intercultural learning.

- **The logic of integration**, on the other hand, encourages pluralism and diversity. Instead of reproducing a particular religious culture, it places all spiritual options on equal standing.

The former seeks to make young people identify with a specific religious membership. The latter is aimed at a cultural transmission of religion from an ecumenical and intercultural perspective, without applying any particular denomination.

This latter perspective is closer to the IE context. It was experimented especially in Quebec/Canada, the United Kingdom²³ and in some Swiss cantons²⁴. Religion is seen as a cultural fact, unlike religious initiation, performed in communities and the church. No longer forced to obey the decision made by the family or the community of origin, the learner will have the opportunity to choose his/her own spiritual path. Instead of an early indoctrination,

²⁰ P. Schreiner, H. Spinder (eds.), *Religious Education in Europe*, Münster, Comenius Institute, 2000.

²¹ M. Milot, « L'école face aux particularismes religieux: deux plaidoyers » In: *Religion, éducation, démocratie. Un enseignement culturel de la religion est-il possible?*, Montréal, Harmattan, 1997, pp. 145-148.

²² There is an additional third option according to which religion is not to be found in school as school is an exclusively secular institution (e.g. in France and the USA).

²³ R. Jackson, "La «nouvelle éducation religieuse» en Grande Bretagne. Bilan partiel de trente années de recherches", In: *Religion, éducation, démocratie*, Montréal, Harmattan, 1997, p. 183.

²⁴ W. Hutmacher, **Culture religieuse et l'école laïque**, Genève, Service de la recherche en éducation, 2003, 2^e éd.

which often makes a person stray from religious belief, he/she is given the chance to become gradually familiar with the religious message.

According to Ouellet²⁵, the intercultural approach to religious education must be integrated in the general context of **citizenship education**. School is a “common space for democratic debate” where every participant is given the chance to make his/her own choices. In modern education, the family delegates some of its authority related to their children’s education to schools. To acquit themselves of these responsibilities, schools prefer to create conditions for gradual choices that pupils make as they grow up and socialise. This is why schools are trying to provide as diverse a cultural and educational environment as possible, open to multiple interests and affinities. From this perspective, deliberative learning encourages a critical understanding of all normative systems whether spiritual, moral or political. The religious fact is closely associated with moral education and “civic virtue”. Pluralist approach and critical understanding are encouraged, with no initial limitation of the range of options.

6. Interactive learning

Learning to live together is basically an instance of interactive learning. It goes beyond traditional social learning (i.e. learning by imitation) and is more than just a source of individual socialisation. **Togetherness** implies another type of social learning, which unlike classical approaches (Bandura, Kurt Lewin, Mucchielli) focuses no longer on the individual but on collective entities. Furthermore, most social and educational goals (e.g. membership, solidarity, interaction, community building, joint responsibility, participatory management, global awareness) cannot be achieved by isolated individuals, but only through learning together: through co-development of knowledge, deliberative reasoning, common projects and collective problem-solving. Learning takes place not only in the minds of individual learners but also in their social and cultural environment²⁶.

This new vision on learning is inspired from the socio-constructivist theory issued in the ‘30s by Vygotski. In the ‘90s, it was updated in the context of a particular drive for social, cultural and civic aspects of human learning. Suffice it to remember in this sense the debates on networked learning, eLearning, intercultural learning, co-operative learning, learning

²⁵ F. Ouellet, L’enseignement religieux comme formation à la délibération démocratique. In : **Religion, éducation, démocratie**, Montréal, Harmattan, 1997, p.151.

²⁶ J.V. Wertsch, A Sociocultural Approach to Socially Shared Cognition. In: L.B. Resnick, J.M. Levine, S.D. Teasley (eds.) **Perspectives on Shared Cognition**, Arlington, American Psychological Association, 1991, pp. 85-100.

society, learning to live together. The debates continue to this day and age and the respective issues are expected to remain in the centre of attention for some time to come.

The research on interactive learning sets out from the following premises:

- Individuals are part of the social and cultural environment, consequently, individual learning is influenced by group-mediated cognition and the networked environments (e.g. by on-line learning communities, group work and action research).
- There is a functional tension between individual understanding, on the one hand, and the group-accepted version, on the other; this self-regulatory tension is the driving force of collective learning processes.
- As the outcome of this inner dynamics, organisations can in turn learn, change their meanings and collective patterns of behaviour (through “organisational learning”).

According to Laats and Simons,²⁷ there are three types of collective learning:

- **learning in networks** – it is highly dynamic because it involves exchanges, reciprocity and common activities; the members of a network associate temporarily to solve common issues (a reunion of the whole network is quite rare);
- **learning in teams** – if networks are more coupled and person-to-person encounters, teams are task-oriented and more structured; teams are created for the purpose of solving a particular issue (e.g. the project teams) and self-dissolve when the issue no longer exists;
- **learning in communities** – unlike groups that are created to carry out a task, communities are emergent; the latter are actually informal groups spontaneously brought together as a joint-venture of people who wish to live together.

All these forms of collective learning may appear at the same time in the same specialised organisation, for instance in schools and universities. To this end, a **community of learners** must be set up, where students are no longer treated as clients that receive knowledge but as participants in knowledge-building communities. For example, Bruffee²⁸ used collective learning in the case of communities of university students. They learned to build their own culture, different from the initial cultural background of each, through intercultural learning.

The extended perspective on IE has a direct impact not only on particular learning methods or institutional settings but also on overall education policies. In this sense, IE is a

²⁷ M. de Laats, R. J. Simons, “Collective Learning: Theoretical Perspectives and Ways to Support Networked Learning”, *European Journal of Vocational Training*, 2002, no. 27, pp. 15-18.

²⁸ K. Bruffee, *Collaborative Learning. Higher Education, Interdependence and the Authority of Knowledge*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1994.

way of learning to live in an ethnically and culturally diverse society. It helps us to better understand the systems of reference, whether they are cultural, moral, religious or civic. It allows us to build new collective identities, including European identity. It provides new insights into sensitive issues such as common history, religious membership, national identities or human migrations.

(This study is part of document *Learning Democracy. Education Policies within the Council of Europe*)