

Highlighting the critical elements of interculturalism: Towards a Critical Intercultural Education

Theodoros Vavitsas

University of Ioannina, Ioannina, Greece

Georgios Nikolaou

University of Patras, Patras, Greece

Abstract

In this article, an attempt is made to highlight critical intercultural education as transcending intercultural education. In particular, the critical elements of the shift of terminology from multiculturalism to interculturalism are first examined. Their differences are pointed out and the need to change the terminology is highlighted. Furthermore, the key points of intercultural education are highlighted and through the core of intercultural education itself, an attempt is made to highlight its critical elements, which may favor the emergence of a critical approach to intercultural education. Finally, based on the theoretical elements from the educational positions of the philosopher and theorist of Critical Theory, Theodor W. Adorno, as presented in his work “Education after Auschwitz”, the basic elements governing critical intercultural education are presented.

Keywords: *Intercultural education, critical intercultural education, Theodor W. Adorno, interculturalism, multiculturalism*

Introduction

The present article serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it draws attention to the reasons that were conducive to the introduction of the concept of

“interculturalism” in scientific discourse, replacing the term “multiculturalism” and, on the other, it illuminates the critical potential of interculturalism and intercultural education. Therefore, it aims to shed light on the possibility of further development and evolution of intercultural education.

In this light, the concept of “multiculturalism”, as well as “cultural relativism”, which is closely linked to it, will be examined in detail. Respectively, we will elaborate on the critique of interculturalism on multiculturalism and its relativistic character. Thus, the “innovation” that interculturalism introduces in the scientific discourse will emerge. Furthermore, the features of intercultural education, as the pedagogical branch that is liable for cultivating students’ tolerant behaviors and respect towards the different, will surface. Finally, we will conclude with the possibility of developing a critical intercultural education, which can be articulated as a “lifting” of intercultural education, emphasizing both the study of social conditions and the content of the proposals of intercultural education itself.

From multiculturalism to interculturalism

In this subchapter we are examining the relationship between postmodernism, multiculturalism and cultural relativism. What we are showing that these concepts are organically related to each other, and we are highlighting the role and importance of interculturalism in relation to these concepts.

So far, in scientific discourse multiculturalism is presented by many not merely as a declarative concept of a situation, that is the coexistence of people coming from different cultural backgrounds in the same geographical area, but as a generalized theory, since multiculturalism has become synonymous to cultural relativism (Wrong, 1997, pp. 291-292; Van der Merwe, 1999, p. 319). This theory is accountable, both for managing the problems brought about by this

coexistence of culturally different people and for articulating a discourse built around diversity, the rights of minorities, etc. However, the term “multiculturalism” is frequently used through a variety of approaches covering a wide spectrum of the content of the concept (see Hall, 2000).

In particular, multiculturalism is, by and large, a consequence of the postmodern approach to reality, since, as David Harvey (1989) argues, postmodernism, by emphasizing diversity, favors globalization and contributes to the erosion of national, linguistic and cultural cultures. These views are the most important legacy inherited by postmodernism to multiculturalism. Questioning national identity, the dominant culture, was the ground within which the multicultural perspective was structured. The above condition, as it is clear, confirms the organic relationship of multiculturalism with postmodernity. The question raised here is “what can this relationship reveal regarding the various contradictory approaches developed under the term ‘multiculturalism’ ?” At this point, it is worth examining the basic principles of postmodernism in order to clarify some key issues related to multiculturalism.

To begin with, postmodernism is an umbrella term used in different ways by different thinkers (Taylor, 2004; Jameson, 1992). Particularly, to be more specific, as Fredric Jameson (1992) pointed out, the term postmodernity is not only controversial, but also internally tense and contradictory. Nevertheless, we can argue that “postmodern” thinkers are generally committed to exploring the complex relationships of power, knowledge, and discourse created in the struggle between social groups (Taylor, 2004, p. 113). Moreover, one of the most important thinkers of postmodernism, Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984, p. xxiv), in his book “The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge”, “signified” postmodernity as “incredulity toward metanarratives”, since postmodern knowledge finds the reason of its existence in the dissonance of

inventors. This could be made clearer if we consider that Lyotard when saying “narrative” means the “Enlightenment narrative” (ibid, p. xxiii). Thus, we can infer that by metanarratives Lyotard denotes the various theories that were articulated in the context of modernity, applying Reason as its main tool. Postmodernity, hence, differs from this line and, as Pauline Marie Rosenau (1992) points out, is articulated as a discourse that opposes to determinism, humanism, causality, objectivity, and rationalism. As a result, we observe a tendency to deconstruct the contradictions that emerge from the dipole objectivity - subjectivity, truth - untruth, knowledge - power, past - present and, more generally, the divisions of modernity (McEvory, 2007), shifting emphasis to the individualities themselves, to the individual approaches, that is, to the “micro-narratives”. In view of all the above, we consider that multiculturalism is very difficult to develop as a comprehensive theory. On the contrary, it is committed to individual, fragmentary and partial approaches, due to the fact that it stems from the core of postmodernity.

However, reflecting on one of the main contradictions of multiculturalism can contribute to the present discussion, as, we have shown, multiculturalism can be “bound” to fragmentation and partiality. Nevertheless, multiculturalism implies that it presupposes cultural relativism or, to put it another way, multiculturalism, as an ideology, combines the anthropological theory of cultural relativism, while, conversely, cultural relativism has become synonymous to multiculturalism (Wrong, 1997, p. 291-292; Van der Merwe, 1999, p. 319). This aspect is to be given prominence to, as it highlights the fact that multiculturalism has become an ideology, since it responds to the question of knowledge and judgment without giving any universal and impartial reason. In fact, the discourse developed by multiculturalism not only even rules out the possibility of doing but it is also, both theoretically and practically, partial and selfish (Donati, 2009, p. 59). Given the above ascertainment, we reach the point

where multiculturalism and cultural relativism are synonymous. Therefore, “behind every decision concerning multiculturalism there are judgments and decisions about the nature and value of both knowledge and culture” (Coulbly, 1993, p. 8), whose “crises” and “decisions”, of course, depend on the individual perceptions of cultural relativism on these issues. Hence, it is clear that in order to explore multiculturalism as thoroughly as possible, we must first examine cultural relativism.

According to Marguerite Holloway (1997), Franz Boas, often referred to as the father of American anthropology, first laid the theoretical basis of cultural relativism in a series of essays published in the 1920s. Boas, as an anthropologist, sought to establish his understanding of cultures different from his own on an objectively, so that would rule out any personal or cultural bias. As a result, he needed to adopt a methodological principle which assures that not only he refrains from making intercultural assessments at the beginning of his research, but he is also helped to become part of the culture under study, to accept its values, traditions and beliefs, in order to achieve a complete “inner” understanding of it (Schmidt, 1955, p. 790). This “coveted” methodological principle, then, was cultural relativism. It is clear, then, that one of the basic principles of cultural relativism is the view that every set of morals and customs or way of life is as valid as any other, as the value of cultural differences cannot be judged a posteriori in relation to a cultural neutral set of criteria and, therefore, all social practices are equally correct while no critique of the values of a culture is objectively justified and independent of that culture (Hartung, 1954, p. 118; Van der Merwe, 1999, p. 318; O'Regan & MacDonald, 2007, p. 271; Schmidt, 1955, p. 783). For this reason, in cultural relativism we are not able to compare different cultures, as no suitable scale for the realization of value judgments of cultural differences can be found, since there are no absolute truths that penetrate the cultural barriers and all kinds of evaluations are directly

related to the cultural background from which they arise (Boas, 1911; Kaplan & Manners, 1972; Warnock, 1979, p. 35; Van der Merwe, 1999, p. 318; Herskovits, 1948, p. 63). Through the lens of cultural relativism, then, reality is interpreted according to the inherent perceptions associated with culture, which is why reality is not objective, but rather subjective, because its nature is determined and depends on the subject who perceives it each time (Karanek, 2013, p. 4).

The views of cultural relativism, and consequently of multiculturalism, despite their seemingly “radical” character, could not provide the necessary solutions to the demand for the harmonious coexistence of culturally different people. Multiculturalism, despite its promises as a moral philosophy and political ideology that could assure the harmonious coexistence of culturally diverse people, ultimately failed to provide solutions -at least insofar as it “promised”- as, on the one hand, it undermines all forms of logic, due to its inherent relativism, and, on the other, it halts at the point where it assumes a coexistence between cultures without, however, seeing how these cultures can interact with each other and how they should or can act in the public sphere, in order to contribute to the formation of a common discourse (see Donati, 2009, p. 59-66). Thus, the emergence of the concept of “interculturalism” added the change of terminology to the already existing problems of multiculturalism. In fact, in recent years the nature of the relationship between these two approaches, multiculturalism and interculturalism, has been the subject of intense debate (Barrett, 2013, p. 15; Levey, 2012; Meer & Modood, 2012), as there are ample conflicting views, which further complicates the debate.

Starting from the views expressed on the relationship between the concepts of “multiculturalism” and “interculturalism”, they can be divided into two categories: the ones that argue that interculturalism is something completely

different from multiculturalism, their main difference being the belief that different cultures can and should interact (Council of Europe, 2008; Levey, 2012; Cantle, 2012), and those who reason that interculturalism is not significantly different from multiculturalism, but simply places more emphasis on certain elements (for example, intercultural dialogue and intercultural communication and interaction) that already exist within the content of multiculturalism (Meer & Modood, 2012; Levey, 2012). We align with the first view, namely, interculturalism, in contrast with multiculturalism, applies a different perspective in managing cultural diversity, on which we are developing next.

Advocators of interculturalism contend that the turning point in the critique of multiculturalism is the lack of intercultural interaction, because multiculturalism is not interested in that. Interculturalism, though, places central emphasis on intercultural dialogue, which can be defined as an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different cultural backgrounds, based primarily on equality (Barrett, 2013, p. 26; Levey, 2012, p. 218). It is worth noting that intercultural dialogue is regarded as one of the most characteristic parameters that indicate the qualitative difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism. More generally, communication and intercultural dialogue can be considered the central elements and defining characteristics through which the intercultural approach seeks the development of deeper understanding of diverse cultural beliefs and practices, the exchange the elements that differ, as well as interpersonal trust and cooperation (Wood et al., 2006, p. 9; Barrett, 2013, p. 26). Despite the fact that intercultural interaction and dialogue seem to exist in some versions of multiculturalism, as in Parekh's interactive multiculturalism, these are not found in other versions of it (Barrett, 2013, p. 26). As a result, intercultural interaction and dialogue should be considered the exception rather than the rule in the multicultural approach,

which poses to be the basic difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism. It is worth noting here that the proponents of interculturalism's critique of multiculturalism not only focuses on the lack of dialogue and interaction, but it also extends to a philosophical, moral and political level. More specifically, as Pierpaolo Donati (2009, p. 61) has pointed out, this critique can be found in the following points: Firstly, at the epistemological limits of multiculturalism, since, despite the fact that it promises the recognition of identities, its epistemological relativism cannot offer ground to it. Furthermore, the moral limits of multiculturalism, since, as a moral philosophy, it leads to the support of an attitude according to which whatever is done, any act, is at the same time legal (Ibid). This attitude results in the existence of moral deviations, which may arise due to human rights violations (Ibid). Multiculturalism is not able to seek redress based on certain moral boundaries, because doing so would violate the founding principle of moral relativism. Thus, the promise of giving society an ethics of civil coexistence is abandoned or disregarded (Ibid). Finally, the political frontiers of multiculturalism, which, though as a political ideology promises tolerance, in fact, creates intransigence (Ibid).

The above points highlight additional, and quite clear this time, differences between multiculturalism and interculturalism, the gap between which is very difficult to bridge. Interculturalism rejects moral relativism, which is based on "cultural difference", and adopts a critical attitude towards unfree cultural practices that violate universal values, which are used as a basis to create a sense of a strongly cohesive society (Barrett, 2013, p. 26; Delafenetre, 1997, p. 92). Interculturalism, then, is a theory that has basic principles and objectives, which, although constantly enriched and varied, can be identified in some key points, expressed by (Barrett, 2013, pp. 28-29):

- Appreciates cultural diversity and pluralism;
- Emphasizes social inclusion;
- Proposes the elimination of the structural causes of political, economic and social disadvantages, inequalities, discrimination, poverty and marginalization;
- Emphasizes intercultural dialogue, mutual action and exchange;
- Aims to create a sense of a strong and cohesive society, based on shared global and universal values;
- Considers that all citizens should have intercultural competence;
- Advocates the development of structures and policies, including a culturally neutral legal and institutional framework to be developed to support intercultural interaction and dialogue;
- Advocates that individuals, groups and political organizations must resist hate speech and intolerance;
- Supports the creation of specific meeting places where intercultural dialogue will be promoted;
- Proposes that this intercultural dialogue operate at interpersonal, community, organizational, institutional and international levels.

Concluding our approach, in an attempt to clarify the different character of interculturalism compared to multiculturalism and to fully justify our belief that the shift from the term “multiculturalism” to the term “intercultural” is of utmost importance, it is worth mentioning briefly the following four points: To begin with multiculturalism, having taken many different forms, triggered confusion over the form that each time corresponds to its meaning (Barrett, 2013, p. 21; Levey, 2012, p. 223), while at the same time has been identified with cultural relativism (Wrong, 1997, p. 291-292; Van der Merwe, 1999, p. 319), resulting in the fragmentation of the term. The need for further explanations whenever the term “multiculturalism” is used, which results from this use of such different contexts, creates strong communication problems. Therefore, we, at least, suspect the insistence of its supporters on the use of the term. Furthermore, the term “multiculturalism” has become so problematic and

so abused in public debate that its semantic capital, compared to the past, has been lost, necessitating a new or different “label” (Levey, 2012, p. 223). The main issue is that multiculturalism encircles different cultural groups and, in essence, prohibits intercultural interaction. This is because, in the case of intercultural interaction, there is a risk of "alterations" of each culture, which is considered to be free from various impurities. Therefore, in order to be quite multicultural, one must also be quite hostile to people belonging to other cultural groups. The different other *a priori* is grouped and homogenized with the whole cultural group to which they belong to. Consequently, it is not difficult to discern the latent racism and xenophobia that are emerging. In addition, multiculturalism has been theoretically delimited by a multitude of contradictory narratives, all of which, however, suffer from excessive ideology (Bharucha, 1999, p. 13), making the very concept of “multiculturalism” an ideology and a mixture of political choices which have not only failed, but can even bring about further tragic consequences. Lastly, interculturalism is an “open” concept, which, unlike multiculturalism, whose proponents have developed a number of theories, is not framed by any epistemological or political component and, therefore, there is scope for elaborating on the concept itself (see Joppke, 2018; Bharucha, 1999, p. 13).

From intercultural education to its “lifting”: Critical intercultural education

According to what has been said so far, we consider that it is imperative and necessary to shift the terminology from multiculturalism to interculturalism. This shift, however, creates an unstable framework for interculturalism and especially for intercultural education, on which we focus in this article.

Our interest in the educational implications of interculturalism is, of course, not accidental. As mentioned above, the goal of both the multicultural and the

intercultural approach is the smooth coexistence of culturally different people. In this endeavor, the role of education is considered crucial, as the school is the first out-family space where the child is called to learn that there are people different from them and to coexist with them. Thus, the role of intercultural education in all this effort is crucial. However, intercultural education seems to face an “identity problem”. On the one hand, in the Anglo-Saxon area, the use of the term multicultural education is preferred/overrides -which often, though not always, refers to cultural relativity- over the term intercultural education (see Nikolaou, 2008, p. 375). On the other hand, intercultural education does not seem to address the problems related to its subject in a systematic way (see Salvadori, 1997, p. 185), since, as various studies demonstrate (Perotti, 1996; Portera, 2000, 2008; Coulby, 2006; Palaiologou & Faas, 2012), the attribution of a clear and distinct epistemological background to intercultural education, based on a specific philosophical basis, has not been achieved.

Apart from the above problems, however, intercultural education has developed a number of extremely important approaches, which can contribute to the effort of smooth coexistence. At this point, our intention is to highlight the critical elements of intercultural education, which can emerge from its basic principles, as formulated by Helmut Essinger, and are, so to speak, the basis on which intercultural education develops its positions. The basic principles of intercultural education, then, laid down by Helmut Essinger (1988, p. 58-72; 1990, p. 22-31) are the following: **education for empathy**, where one learns to understand others and to see problems in their own light; **education for solidarity**, where the individual constructs the collective consciousness by setting aside social inequalities and injustices, and transcending the boundaries of race and state; **education for intercultural respect**, where openness to others is an invitation for their participation in our culture, thus cultivating respect for cultural diversity; **education against the nationalist way of**

thinking, where the individual tries to get rid of national stereotypes and prejudices that prevent him from communicating with other peoples.

The above principles of intercultural education are crucial and play a key role in trying to turn education into “intercultural”. However, what is the role of intercultural education today, at a time when the sharpening of xenophobic and racist slogans (see Jolly & DiGiusto, 2014; Baker, Cañarte & Edward Day, 2018; Jolly & Beller, 2020; Ullah et. al., 2020; Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2021) is evident and the revival of the neo-fascist phenomenon (see Richardson, 2019; Cammaerts, 2020) is emerging with increasing tendencies? Or, to put it another way, is intercultural education a failure, since, as it seems, its proclamations, based on the image that prevails in the public sphere, have no substantial effect or any substantial result? Our response is that if intercultural education does not want to be another unsuccessful endeavor, it must highlight the causes that lead to the intensification of xenophobic, racist and neo-fascist attitudes. In order to achieve this, however, intercultural education must study seriously and decisively the social conditions, and in particular the individual terms, due to which such behaviors are born and reproduced. In other words, intercultural education must examine the causes that hinder the achievement of its proclamations, namely the attainment of empathy, solidarity, intercultural respect and anti-nationalist way of thinking. This is what we intend to do next.

A basic principle of intercultural education, as discussed above, is the cultivation of empathy. However, is there anything that hinders the cultivation of empathy or that makes it incomplete? In order to approach the answer to this question, we are focusing on some of the concepts that Theodor W. Adorno developed in his work “Education after Auschwitz”, and especially in the concept of “coldness”. In particular, in his attempt to understand and interpret the reasons that led to the atrocity of Auschwitz, Adorno (1971) touches on the

fact that in the existing social conditions (capitalist relations of production, society of exchange, etc.), as the human character has been formed, coldness has developed as a key feature of anthropology. It is to coldness that tolerance and unresponsiveness of the people to the barbarity and to what took place in the concentration camps can, to some extent, at least, be attributed. For Adorno, this indifference lies in man's inability to identify with other groups and other people with whom he does not share common interests or is not related to (Ibid). We understand, then, that the possibility of empathy seems to be questioned, especially if the individual does not have “common interests” with the “different other”, in whose place he should have entered. At this point, however, Adorno does not oppose empathy per se, but by touching on the individual's coldness and difficulty in identifying with individuals of other groups, seeks to reveal the objective social conditions behind this weakness, aiming at both criticizing social conditions, and, through the obsession with the content of empathy, highlighting the different possibility that can emerge through the content of empathy itself. Thus, we consider that a first point can be identified justifying the necessity of a change of perspective, an argument in favor of interculturalism and against multiculturalism. As mentioned above, multiculturalism, in the name of maintaining the purity of cultures, does not accept interaction. This, taking into account Adorno's treatments, leads to an intensification of coldness towards those who are considered different. It is clear, then, that multiculturalism, conceiving the individual as a member of a collective, tends to reinforce within them, those forces that favor a return to barbarism. Approaching, then, solidarity, the second crucial concept of intercultural education, in the same way, we fall again on the concept of “coldness”, which makes it difficult for individuals to become truly in solidarity with those who are not connected to the tangible, common interests. It is not our intention to claim that the declarations of intercultural education for “empathy” and “solidarity” are a “blank letter”, but only to highlight the fact that various

forces which affect the individual emerge from the competitive social context. Under the influence of these forces, and in order to protect oneself from the often hostile reality, the individual is forced to develop patterns of perception of reality that distance him from individuals with whom he is not directly connected and does not belong to his familiar group. Based on this admission, we can conclude that intercultural education, in order to gain influence in the public sphere, must point out the existence of coldness and try to make the concepts of “empathy” and “solidarity” from intra-group to out-group. Is it that easy, given the conditions of a competitive society? We do not consider it to be. However, we can accept the fact that a new prospect is being opened for intercultural education.

Turning to the other two principles of intercultural education, namely the demand for the cultivation of intercultural respect and anti-nationalist thinking, it is worth elaborating on Adorno’s positions on nationalism again. First of all, referring again to Auschwitz, this time to the detriment of another group instead of the Jews, and wanting to point out the possibility of relocating what then exploded there, Adorno states that what further promotes the climate of such a renaissance is revived nationalism which is very bad, because in the age of international communication and supranational coalitions he cannot believe in himself very well and is obliged to exaggerate without measure in order to convince himself and others that he still has some substance (Adorno, 1971). Here, then, we can see the key role that intercultural education can play. To do so, however, it must persevere in its effort to cultivate anti-nationalist thinking, but also in the general contribution that this way of thinking can make to the further cultivation of intercultural respect and tolerance to diversity. Moreover, anti-nationalist thinking can also contribute to the cultivation of empathy and solidarity with the “different other”, as, by definition, anti-nationalism breaks the boundaries of the “intra-group” and the refined image it has usually for

itself. This paves the way for acquaintance, recognition and communication with “out-groups”, which clearly shows the importance of anti-nationalism for intercultural education.

In light of all the above, we consider that a different dimension emerges in intercultural education. Adopting a critical attitude even towards the assumptions and propositions that intercultural education itself prepares, it is renewed, it does not settle for absolute constants and it becomes critical intercultural education. The critical intercultural education, is not content with the elaboration of certain pedagogical advice, but examines the facts as a whole, challenges established practices, even reaches the analysis of social conditions and, in a sense, removes itself and constantly evolves into something higher. It is clear, then, that such intercultural education, a critical intercultural education, is not only necessary, but can become a determining factor in the improvement and evolution of the public sphere and of society as a whole.

Conclusions

In the present article we have tried to highlight the need to shift the terminology from multiculturalism to interculturalism and the critical elements of intercultural education. We consider that the core of the whole effort is its decisive element: the dialectic, as this is displayed in the title of this article. The concept of “interculturalism” entails a critical potential, as it does not start from scratch to build its content, but is synthesized as a denial of multiculturalism, as an inexhaustible critique of it. In addition, interculturalism sees and highlights the internal contradiction of multiculturalism, something that multiculturalism itself has not been able to achieve. And it is in this light that interculturalism develops having a purely critical feature and it would not be an exaggeration to support the position that it develops as an “uplift” of multiculturalism. Of course, this critical character of interculturalism has not been highlighted as it

should be. On the contrary, what we could claim is that it has been systematically ignored. The reasons for this development might be the subject of a new study, but they certainly go beyond the scope of this article.

Moreover, on the other hand, intercultural education, when it criticizes social conditions and critically examines its own content, as we have shown above, essentially removes itself. Transformed into critical intercultural education, it transcends it, as it examines the inner elements of social wholeness and its content, seeking to find the critical moment that will allow it to carry out the “lifting”.

In conclusion, what we would like to point out again is that, in our opinion, the critique is not another approach, another method of interpreting interculturalism, but an organic part of it, which lies in its core. Therefore, we believe that this relationship should be studied more extensively.

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Author Details

Vavitsas Theodoros, Faculty of Education, Department of Primary Education, University of Ioannina, Greece.

Email: vavitsast@gmail.com & v.vavitsas@uoi.gr

Tel. +30 6984836353

Nikolaou Georgios, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Education and Social Work, University of Patras.

Email: gnikolaou@upatras.gr

Corresponding Author: Theodoros Vavitsas