

## **Towards Post-intercultural Education in Finland?**

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“Each of us involves identities of various kinds in disparate contexts. The same person can be of Indian origin, a Parsee, a French citizen, a US resident, a woman, a poet, a vegetarian, an anthropologist, a university professor, a Christian, a bird watcher, and an avid believer in extra-terrestrial life and of the propensity of alien creatures to ride around the cosmos in multicoloured UFOs. Each of these collectivities, to all of which this person belongs, gives him or her a particular identity. They can all have relevance, depending on the context”. (Sen, 2005: 350)

### **Introduction**

Terms like *multicultural*, *intercultural*, *cross-cultural*, but also *social justice*, *global* and even *special needs* are frequently associated with education to denote a type of education that takes into account *diversity* in educational contexts. They often refer to either relationships between the various actors involved (teachers, pupils, administrators, parents, etc.) or to learning/teaching content. Yet these labels are all quite polysemic and often lead to confusion and mis-/non-understandings between researchers, researchers, practitioners and decision-makers. It is thus now urgent to delimitate their

understanding to make education really transparent, equitable, fair and consistent.

The notions of *multicultural* and *intercultural* have been in use in Finnish education, often interchangeably. Both are increasingly “under egregious assault” (McLaren & Ryoo, 2012: 61) in global research. For Annette Henry (2012: 42) for instance, the word *multicultural* “lacks definitional consensus in quotidian life as well as in the academic literature”. The same can be said about the intercultural (Dervin, 2012). Researchers and practitioners alike have referred to the history of these two notions to oppose them: multicultural education emerged out of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA in the 1970s and was interested in diversity from within (different types of minorities) while intercultural education is often considered as a European phenomenon related to the massive arrival of migrants in the 1970s and later in the case of Finland, following decolonization and accelerated globalization (Abdallah-Preteuille, 1986). Today this antagonism appears to be less and less valuable as both the intercultural and multicultural in education seem to suggest very similar

conceptualisations and methodological interests (Dervin et al., 2012).

In this chapter, I propose the term “Post-intercultural education” to explain how multiculturalism can be dealt with in Finnish education, with an emphasis on children. I am interested in both the questions: what does post-intercultural entail for all the actors involved in education, especially in the ways they treat each other and how post-intercultural education could be implemented in terms of contents, learning and teaching? My approach departs from widespread societal and scientific discourses on the matter in Finland as I wish to explore how we can examine these questions without implementing what Sarangi (1994) has called an “analytic stereotyping” of the intercultural in education. I am also very much inspired by A. Holliday (2010)’s warning about the potential link between ideology and the intercultural in education and beyond.

## **1. What is Post-intercultural Education? Identities at the center**

My use of the adjective “post-intercultural” is a direct reference to the *post-* in e.g. postmodernity. It indicates a move from certain practices and characteristics of an era. For postmodernity this means going beyond the imposition of a solid and single identity on individuals, and beyond methodological nationalism (“the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural and political form of the modern world”, Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002), which characterised Modernity (Bauman, 2004; Maffesoli, 2012). Taking into account these aspects, I am motivated by the ideal of making the post-intercultural in education more adapted to our times, more meaningful and thus more beneficial to education.

A central aspect of post-intercultural education is related to the notion of identity and especially that of identification (identity as a process rather than a product, Maffesoli, 1997; Dervin, 2011). When defining someone as “diverse” or “multicultural”, we need to bear in mind that such positionings are subjective and necessitate both decision- and meaning-making. It is often

those who have the power who decide who carries these characteristics, while the people in question might contest the idea. For Abdallah-Preteuille (2006: 480), “nothing is intercultural at the outset”: qualifying something as intercultural/multicultural/diverse (a habit, an encounter, etc.) is a just way of analysing such elements. Many children in around the world are labelled as “immigrants” or “others” in education while, if we ask them or their parents about their identities (or identification), they might refute these labels. Though practitioners often use them to “help” the children, by providing support, special needs education or extra instructions in Finnish or Swedish as a Second Language, the labels might stay with them forever, impede on their future and make a difference that will never allow them to be like “the others”. It is quite surprising for example that some children whose parents were born outside Finland, but who were themselves born in Finland, are given the label ‘immigrants’ by educational institutions. Will they ever be given the possibility of being a Finn?

The French sociologist de Singly (2003: 48-49) worries for instance about the fact that many pupils of ‘immigrant

backgrounds' spend 70% of their time out of 'normal' lessons to learn e.g. about their 'heritage' culture and language. Though he is talking about France this applies to Finland too. He explains that for a large majority of pupils the 'heritage' that is often imposed on them represents an "abuse of power" (ibid.: 91) and can lead to certain forms of totalitarianism. Deciding on someone's culture or language (see below) might appear as obvious to educators, researchers or decision-makers, while in fact the choice might be limiting and extremely political (e.g. some children might have two or more first languages; some children might feel very Finnish, etc.).

In his study on identity and academic learning in an American classroom in the USA, Wortham (2005) has clearly demonstrated how the use of certain adjectives or words to refer to some students might impact on their attitudes, behaviours, long-term identity and chances to succeed. In a similar vein, Sunil (2011: 77) explains, about the same context, that "Schools usually neglect to examine how the structural forces of institutionalized racism and transnational ties of identities of immigrants are often tied to contexts of learning and teaching that are connected to diverse localities, cultures,

and contradictory conceptions of identity. The focus is usually on minority students' lack of motivation, academic disengagement, and how low literacy skills rather than examining the role of the complex processes of identity formation that shape radicalized minority and immigrant populations". Post-intercultural education must thus consider each of the children as individuals who have multiple identities and who need support to develop a range of identities rather than be 'boxed' in one identity, being linguistic or 'cultural'. These elements need to be negotiated with both the pupils and their parents. Negotiating means here to give them a real voice beyond the official voices of our educational systems (e.g. if they don't want to learn 'their' language and culture, they should be allowed to remain with the others in class).

In the field of multicultural education, James Banks (2008) takes the notion of the multicultural to mean much more than "foreign origins", and to include different forms of diversities and their intersection: gender, religion, social class, language, etc. I have also argued through the oxymoron "*diverse diversities*" that we need to take into account *all* pupils' identities (less able, more able, rich, poor, Lestadian,

homosexual, etc.) in Finnish education in order to put an end to the hierarchization of Otherness in our classrooms, i.e. the immigrant only (Dervin, 2013). As such, while talking to many researchers and practitioners, I feel that they still consider only the Other to be “diverse” (whatever the term means) and “Finnish” students (nationality but also roots) to be all the same. There is a danger here as this imagined understanding of difference and similarity can have long-lasting consequences, especially for those who do not have access to power. In this sense, Finnish educators, researchers and decision makers could learn a lot from the ‘mistakes’ made by other European countries such as France, Sweden or the UK, who systematically resorted to such practices towards immigrants. In many cases, the consequences were rather negative and led to violence (e.g. riots and terrorism in France and the UK in the 2000s). In her 2007 book, entitled *Multiculturalism without Culture*, Anne Phillips analyses the London bomb attacks of 2005 and shows convincingly how the way the attackers (who were all British but of immigrant origins) had been deprived of multiple identities (and thus power) through a form of political multiculturalism that laid too much emphasis on difference and

essentialised forms of culture. This probably led them to such actions.

In summary post-intercultural education takes into account what Michel Foucault claimed about identity: “I don’t feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it?” (Foucault, 1988: 10).

## **2. The danger of recycling ill-adapted models of analysis**

Reviewing the literature on multi-/inter-cultural education in Finland, I have noted that several contested models are still in use to deal with multiculturalism – meaning immigrants in this case – in education (see e.g. Räsänen, 2010; Ruokonen & Kairavuori, 2012). Used in other fields such as political science, cross-cultural and acculturation psychology, the most influential acculturation, adaptation and integration theories were proposed by J.W. Berry and his colleagues (e.g., Berry, 1997) and M. Bennett (1993). Bennett’s (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) has become one of

the most used models in Finnish education. This model seems to have “contaminated” the way many researchers and practitioners conceive and speak of diversity (the immigrant again) in the classroom. Bennett’s model is problematic as the main target group for it has always been the business world. On Bennett’s website (<http://www.idrinstitute.org/page.asp?menu1=2&menu2=3>), we are told that “Through *Bennett Intercultural Development, LLC*, Dr. Bennett creates and conducts programs in domestic and international diversity for corporations and other organizations. He addresses high-potential managers and executives of global corporations in the U.S., Asia, and Europe on topics of global leadership and the development of intercultural competence for themselves and their organizations. He also conducts seminars for corporate trainers and university faculty in Japan, Italy, Finland, Switzerland, Germany, and the U.S”. My first concern is that a business model (for which one needs to pay to use), is imported in primary education to ‘deal with’ and create discourses about children.

Bennett's model is problematic first as it is progressive, linear and very much biased in the way it talks about the intercultural and related concepts such as culture (see below): 1. Denial of difference, 2. Defense against difference, 3. Minimization of difference, 4. Acceptance of difference, 5. Adaptation to difference and 6. Integration of difference. In other words, the model gives the impression that the way people 'adapt' follows a clear path.

Many critical voices have been raised recently about Bennett's work (outside education). Post-intercultural education is very sensitive to these criticisms. Pawel Boski (2008: 142), for instance, tells us that the "central assumptions of the field [Psychology of acculturation] are debatable on conceptual and psychometric grounds". Bhatia, a researcher who has done some extensive work on Indian scholars in the USA questions some of the foundations of acculturation theories in an article with Ram (2009) as "(... ) it is not clear what the term 'integration' exactly means. How does one know when someone is integrated or not with the host culture? Who decides whether an immigrant is pursuing a strategy of marginalization, integration or separation?". In his study on the "integration" of Indian scholars in the USA, Bhatia (2007) shows that feelings and expressions of

psychological integration can differ overtime as they depend on who is judging whether somebody is considered as integrated or not: an observer, a member of the host/home society or the actor himself. For Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2010: 87), “in the past immigrants had to choose between two overall monocultural settings, now they navigate between two or more multicultural environments”.

Another problem with the overused model is the omnipresence of the idea of *difference*. The Other, the foreign other in Bennett’s case, is only viewed through the lens of ‘cultural difference’, thus ignoring the fact that people also share many similarities across borders. This is problematic as it contributes to the idea that people within the same national boundaries are similar and that when they cross borders they are automatically different from the ones they meet. I have named this the “differentialist bias” in education (Dervin, 2012). The consequences of this bias are many and varied. One example is that of comparison, though it is a ‘normal’ phenomenon, in education comparing cultures and differences often leads to moralistic judgments and positioning of self and other as ‘better’, ‘worse’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (Holliday, 2010; Phillips, 2010).

Shi-xu (2001: 280-281) allows us to make a final criticism towards such Bennett's model. 'Intercultural' problems are often attributed to one individual only (usually the Other, the "guest"), who is labeled as 'incompetent' or "more charitably, the languages and cultures that they carry with them" (ibid.). 'Mistakes' thus derive from 'their' lack of knowledge – knowledge of 'our' culture. In order to counter such problems, educators try to provide individuals (the Other) with knowledge about how 'we' function. Yet Shi-xu (2001: 280) reminds us that "an individual-knowledge minded approach would fail to take account of the joint, social nature of communication, the social action aspect (e.g. speech act) of communication and the consequences of the action; jointly constructed (inter)action".

A knowledge-based approach to intercultural education, which can allow people to move up e.g. Bennett's ladder, is thus awkward. The notions of power, inequality but also "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 1991) are absent from such approaches. We argue that for example the use, overuse and abuse of the concept of culture contribute to unbalanced power relations in the way we treat the Other in education (Dervin, 2012) and that this needs to be addressed seriously. Furthermore, according to Annette Henry (2012: 52) the biased "Deficit framework (...)

perpetuates stereotypes and deflects attention from the real underlying causes of underachievement of marginalized students”.

### **3. Post-intercultural education: The intercultural without culture?**

Following Amartya Sen (2005: 54), I name certain concepts that are in use when working on inter-/multi-cultural education, “intellectual simplifiers”. This is the case of, for instance, the concept of culture, which, according to Prashad (2001: xi, amongst others), has been “smuggled in to do the same thing” as e.g. the concept of race. The researcher claims that: “Culture becomes the means for social and historical difference, how we differentiate ourselves, and adopt habits of the past to create and delimitate social groups” (ibid.). Education has actively contributed to this phenomenon and is allowing culture to “wrap us in its suffocating embrace” (ibid.: xi), often deciding for the Other what her/his culture is, turning them into “zoological specimens” (ibid.: xi) who are “stuck with it”. Even though this might be done with “the best intentions of respect and tolerance” (ibid.: xi), we need to be critical towards this approach.

In many schools across Finland, 'culture' is used on a daily basis. As such, even though a child was born in Finland, of parents who have migrated to the country some 30 years ago, educational actors (and researchers!) often decide what the child's culture is and sometimes ask him/her to play this 'cultural other'. The aspects of culture that are retained to characterize these children often seem to correspond to what Gillespie et al. (2012) have to say about the concept: as if they were "stuck in the past". In her analysis of multicultural fairs/days (which are common in Finnish schools), Kromidas (2011) shows the dangers of 'boxing' children in 'their' culture. During these events, the children have to wear e.g. "traditional costumes" and bring artefacts or traditional music of their "culture"/ "country" (imagine asking the same of "Finnish" pupils!). In most cases, the children have never visited 'their' country and they live a 'Finnish' life like others. Post-intercultural education is adamantly against such essentialising and limiting practices.

Culture is an old and tired concept, which has been highly contested in e.g. cultural studies, anthropology and sociology. For Piller (2011: 172) "Culture is sometimes nothing more than

a convenient and lazy explanation”, which can be used to suit people’s purposes (*in their culture, they... I cannot do that because in my culture...*). A move away from solid representations of cultures to an understanding of the concept as “a social construct vaguely referring to a vastly complex set of phenomena” (Jahoda, 2012: 300) needs to be increasingly present in research and practice in education. This means that we need to start asking these questions: Who decides what culture is and for whom? Whose culture is represented and talked about? Who is not allowed to talk/comment on (their) culture? Why do people use discourses on culture? Etc. These questions should substitute the typical questions of “what is their culture? And how can I learn it to communicate with them?” that are in use in education.

For Gillespie et al. (2012: 394), “People move between places, social roles, life stages, genders, abilities, social classes and even cultures – and in so doing, they move between many social categories”. The solid approach to culture does not allow everyone to move between social categories in the same manner and to accumulate, co-construct and negotiate roles and identities. The more of those, the easier it is to find one’s place

in a society, and the more chances of succeeding like the others. Success in relation to “immigrant” pupils is always explained by their ‘cultural background’ but rarely by other elements (e.g. *this child is not so good at mathematics because of his culture*). Post-intercultural education looks beyond this ‘alibi’ and analyses contexts, power relations, language (e.g. how teachers talk to the children), discriminatory practices, ‘boxing, etc. to propose some hypotheses as to why a child is not succeeding.

When some of our pupils are ‘boxed’ and sometimes segregated because of their culture (explicitly or not), the array of social categories they are allowed to navigate between is very limited. This is why post-intercultural education should rely on an understanding of education “which shows that social categories come and go (...). Once the social categories are seen as temporal, they are destabilized, becoming peculiar, something to be interested in, but not something to taken too seriously” (Gillespie et al., 2012: 399).

As a consequence Finnish researchers and educators need to beware of how they categorise their pupils. In his criticism of Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*, Sen (2005: 54)

explains that he misplaces India in the category of “the Hindu civilization”, as it “downplays the fact that India has many more Muslims (more than 140 million – larger than the entire British and French populations put together) than any other country in the world with the exception of Indonesia and, marginally Pakistan, and that nearly every country in Huntington’s definition of the ‘Islamic civilisation’ has fewer Muslims than India has”. The more power people have to determine and construct their own identities (and movements between identities), the better it is for social justice, development and ‘integration’. These values, especially in this renewed understanding, should be central in the way every child is treated in Finnish education.

## **Recommendations**

Reaching the end of this chapter, many readers probably wonder how post-intercultural education can ‘work’ in reality, especially as it is ‘without culture’. I do not think that there is an easy recipe but I would like to make the following recommendations.

1. It is of high importance that school actors (and us researchers) pay attention to the words that they use when they talk about children. The word *culture* is extremely ideological and can lead to hierarchizing pupils and the ‘biologization’ of certain ‘negative’ cultural differences. Wikan’s advice should allow us to pay attention to this: “If people “of different cultures” are to meet, it must be as people, as persons, for it is only thus we can meet. And then the stage is set for something that can foster mutual respect and understanding – or struggle” (2002: 158).

2. My second recommendation derives from the first: Whenever we interact with an other, we co-construct who we are, and thus create signs of difference and similarity with them, in specific contexts. This is identification, or a process of imagining self and other. A discourse on a specific cultural characteristic (*Turks are...*) or identity (*I feel more Finnish than American or vice-versa*) cannot but be positions taken on by a speaker for and with another speaker, and thus they do not need to be taken at face value. Moghaddam’s Omniculturalism, an alternative to assimilation and adaptation as criticized in this chapter (2012), can allow researchers and practitioners alike to

work in that direction. The researcher suggests two stages in the socialization of young people in education (ibid.: 306): “During the first stage, the omniculturalism imperative compels us to give priority to human commonalities, and requires that children are taught the important scientifically-established commonalities that characterize human beings”. The second stage introduces group-based differences and the idea of diversity (intersection of various identity markers), while still prioritizing “human commonalities” (ibid.).

3. My third and last recommendation relates to the idea of power and its consequences for education (injustice, marginalization, etc.). Language has a central role to play here. Empowering pupils by working on how the criticisms that we have brought to the stage in this chapter are constructed through discourse and interaction is essential. This should lead to teaching pupils how to identify ideologies, (hidden) stereotypes, positionings, comparisons, and injustice in the ways they are treated by others. For example, when introducing the imagined notion of *sisu*, which is used to determine Finns as perseverant, strong in front of adversity, it is the duty of the teacher to deconstruct how and why the notion was constructed

by Finns and for Finns, and not to use it as a way of placing (explicitly or not) those who were born in Finland “above” those who were not and biologizing the notion (*sisu* is in your blood, either you have it or not) (Taramaa, 2007). Finally, reflecting on how self and other are constructed should also allow pupils to be able to move between a vast range of roles and identities in schools and outside schools (de Singly, 2003: 12) and to reject the ‘origins’ (language and culture) that are often imposed on them by the system, if they want to... or to work with educators and researchers to negotiate the images and components associated to these elements (Dervin & Keihäs, 2013).

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