Critical Intercultural Education: Necessities and Prerequisites for its Development in Greece

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Abstract

The term "multiculturalism" covers different ideas and approaches. More often multiculturalism approaches the phenomenon using civilization as the main interpretative scheme. From this point of view, multicultural discourse, as well as the educational practices that are based on multiculturalism, start from a statical attestation of the meaning of culture, they codify "differentiation" in cultural differences, writing off other social, class or economic parameters --- and at the same time they speak about the need of maintaining those differences in order to keep the continuance of cultural tradition.

During recent years, on the above basis, an interest has evolved in the emergence of a critical multiculturalism that can surmount the contradiction, the stalemates and the prejudices of the dominant multicultural speech, taking into account the social, political, economical and cultural conditions of the structures of identity.

The present essay explores the intercultural educational policies which is applied today in Greek schools and examines the prerequisites for the development of a critical intercultural education that will lead to a complete change in the way we encounter the formation of identity.

Keywords: intercultural education, critical multiculturalism, critical intercultural education, greek educational system.

Introduction

The term "multiculturalism" is an umbrella term that covers different ideas and approaches, pointing up the disagreement between political philosophers concerning the term itself. More often multiculturalism approaches the phenomenon using civilization as the main interpretative scheme.

From this point of view, multicultural discourse, as well as the educational practices that are based on multiculturalism, start from a statical attestation of the meaning of culture, they codify "differentiation" in cultural differences, writing off other social, class or economic parameters --- and at the same time they speak about the need of maintaining those differences in order to keep the continuance of cultural tradition.

During recent years, on the above basis, an interest has evolved in the emergence of a critical multiculturalism that can surmount the contradiction, the stalemates and the prejudices of the dominant multicultural speech, taking into account the social, political, economical and cultural conditions of the structures of identity.

Critical intercultural education derives from this multicultural discourse. It does not suffice solely with some correctional interventions to the standing curricula, but aims toward the complete and radical transformation of the educational system.

The present essay explores the intercultural educational policies which is applied today in Greek schools and examines the prerequisites for the development of a critical intercultural education that will lead to a complete change in the way we encounter the formation of identity.

Critical Intercultural Education. Conceptual Definition

Intercultural Education is the answer of the educational system in Greece to the changes occurring within the socio-cultural framework. It involves a pedagogical approach to managing the society's multicultural character, as it has evolved shaped by historical, social and economic conditions (Gotovos, 2002). It is grounded on the assumption that multiculturalism constitutes an enriching factor for society and the educational system, and shapes the requirements for the mutual interaction between the various cultural traditions.

Intercultural education is connected to the process of the meeting of cultures and their mutual interaction. It stems from the need to manage the versatility of cultural traditions, value systems and symbols found within a social framework. It is not feasible to formulate a general theory for interculturalism, despite the locality-independent and time-independent characteristics it might present, since theoretical quests are influenced by the conditions prevailing in the specific time-space framework where they are formulated. Despite all this, it could be connected to the critical outlook of the collective identities and the cultural traditions, both of the relevant one as well as the others, through a reflective process for critique and questioning of the given, implicit and established perceptions. In reality, intercultural pedagogy raises the demand for recognition and equal presence of a range of different forms of cultural capital in the educational field.

In a broader approach, the intercultural premise in education involves on the one hand interrogating every traditional aspect of the education process and teaching activity, while on the other hand broadening its targets. From this perspective, the intercultural approach is not an "educational practice" limited to simple proposals of organizing and designing what happens in teaching. It represents more of a total proposal extending to the critique and questioning of the basic ethical and philosophical assumptions of education. What we refer to as 'intercultural intention' encompasses a spectrum of changes extending from the educational structures and foundational characteristics of the educational system up to the level of the teaching practices and the development of interpersonal relations.

The discussion about intercultural education, both as a system of theoretical principles as well as a program for educational intervention, is defined principally by talk about multiculturalism, i.e. the model of multi-culture out of which it draws its references, and the assumptions it contains regarding the principles governing public space, position of subjects, the role of collectivity, etc.

Intercultural education was often based on approaches to the multicultural phenomenon which describe it as the existence of different ethnic or cultural groups within a social framework, using culture as the primary interpretative scheme. The dominant multicultural discourse, proceeding from a static view of the meaning of culture and by extension a perception of cultural differences as objective and invariable, codifies «differentiality» in relation to cultural differences, ignoring other social, class or economic parameters. It grounds its analysis upon the need to preserve these differences as the adoption and continuation of cultural tradition (Govaris, 2002). It seems that in such an approach to multiculturalism, what constitutes the cultural identity of foreigners is defined based on the perceptions of the dominant group regarding the cultural other, and not based on the needs of the foreigners themselves. Such approaches generate concern about whether intercultural education promotes intercultural encounter and communication, or exacerbates and perpetuates phenomena of discrimination and exclusion.

It is often observed, that intercultural education programs, aiming at the recognition and cultivation of immigrant cultural identity, insist upon retaining cultural elements or practices unable to constitute a reliable and functional framework for the interpretation of reality. This means that the forms of intercultural education structured on the basis of these theoretical assumptions can be easily transformed into a conservative reason for preserving the existing relations of authority and dominance for the majority group.

In order for multicultural discourse to be functional it will have to be accompanied by the elucidation of issues such as what elements constitute difference and who defines them, what kind of recognition is sought and whether this extends to the public sphere, which content is attributed to the meaning of 'preservation' and whether this refers simply to the reproduction of cultural capital. On the basis of this consideration and the attempt to improve access of interculturalism from cultural differences, an interest has recently evolved within the social sciences concerning the emergence of a *critical–reflective multiculturalism*. This goes beyond the contradictions, dead-ends and prejudices of the dominant multicultural discourse, taking into account the social, political, economic and cultural terms of identity composition. (McLennan, 2001; Parekh, 2000; May, 1999; Joppke & Lukes, 1999).

No one can speak of a uniform approach to critical multiculturalism and what it constitutes. Thus, we find terms like *critical multiculturalism* (May, 1999; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995), *revolutionary multiculturalism* (McLaren, 1995), *reflexive multiculturalism* (Rattansi, 1999). Despite the fact that no agreement exists among scholars in relation to what critical multiculturalism is and how it is delimited in order for it to be functional as a conceptual scheme, all these approaches draw their theoretical references from critical social theory, while positing the need for excluded groups to struggle against institutionalized forms of ranking, domination and supremacy as a shared aim.

Critical multiculturalism springs from a neo-Marxist base and emphasizes the role of language and representations in shaping identity composition. What distinguishes it from other forms of multiculturalism is the constructivist approach to conceptions such as identity and culture. The identity has no essentialist character so as to be considered static or to be governed by an unbreakable unity. Meaning is approached

not as a given but as a social construction, whose composition is realized on the basis of social, political and cultural influences and interests, and as such is subject to constant evolution, reshaped both time-independently as well as synchronically.

Culture is approached as a conception distinguished by internal differentiation, since Otherness exists both among as well as inside groups, as a result of history, authority and ideology. Culture is passed on to individuals but at the same time it is also (trans-) formed by them.

Given the emphasis placed by the critical theory upon the historical, social and political framework within which social relations are formed and developed, critical multiculturalism disputes the traditional political and cultural hegemony of the dominant class or group. Its basic feature is the request for complete restructuring and renegotiation of the relations of power and authority between the cultural groups, confirming in this way its emancipatory character, as well as within the groups themselves, highlighting the critical stance against tradition as its basic principle.

Critical multiculturalism marks the move from incorporation and tolerance to concepts like equality and justice. It does not refer to the simple coexistence within the same social framework of many closed and entrenched ethnic-cultural groups, but instead to the development of mutual interaction between these groups, in the framework of a society recognizing the same rights for all ethnic-cultural groups, rendering them equal interlocutors at public space. The meaning of 'meritocracy' is dealt with as ideology composed on the basis of dealing with society as a total of individuals/citizens. It acts to conceal and legalize the class relations of dominance-submission. Additionally, it classifies cultural differences within a broader framework of authority relations. This means that differentiated cultural knowledge which students have at school is acknowledged, yet such differing cultural capital is dealt with as a result of unequal socio-economic relations (May, 1999).

Another epistemological origin of critical multiculturalism comes from the post-modern paradigm, which places the study of the identity–Otherness dipole on a new basis. Post-modernism marks the move from the one and dominant, to the multiple, encompassing different and equal expressions and experiences. It rejects the existence of one uniform discourse and attempts the deconstruction of dominant reasons, revealing contradictions and authority structures everywhere.

Post-modernism locates the origins of forming a negative perception about the other in its critique of so-called 'neoterism' and the absolute trust in science and man characterizing it. This includes the agonizing attempt to apply control, enforce order, limit the unpredictable and the unknown, leading to the formation of dipoles, a series of binary contradictions (Bauman, 1991). These dualities created the need to place a subject within a category, excluding ambiguity or the formation of a flexible and inclusive identity that might allow for many groups, categories or entireties. Thus, there is no room in neoterism for "neither the one, nor the other. The foreigner is perceived as 'scrap of the state sorting zeal'" (Bauman, 2002: 46). His presence undermines the existence of concrete and crystal-clear delimitations. Post-modernism overcomes this sorting principle of dualities, abolishes the absolute limits and borders and acknowledges the existence of intermediate spaces.

This discourse about critical multiculturalism, forming a novel paradigm in the way multiculturalism is handled, and sets the limits for the formation of a new approach to intercultural education. It is about an educational approach with a radical/transformative character, dealing naturally with aspects of Otherness in the education field; however, Otherness is classified into the stratification accruing from capitalist social organization, resulting in the mutual intertwining with social and class differentiations. Banks (1997) defines it as a 'transforming' approach to social action, Sleeter & Grand (1987) see it as the approach of social reconstruction, Sleeter & McLaren (1995) as critical multicultural education.

As critical multiculturalism draws its references from the critical tradition, critical intercultural education is directly related to critical pedagogy, which attempts to combine macro-sociological with micro-sociological narratives. In this way, it takes into consideration the importance of the social structure as highlighted by macro-theories, though without disdaining the individual. On the other hand, the emphasis on subject dynamics does not lead to its slipping towards some form of ultra-subjectivism, as occurs with micro-interpretative approaches (Givalos, 2005· Lamnias, 2001). This emphasis on human will by proponents of critical pedagogy moves beyond the uni-dimensional classical Marxist interpretation scheme of the reproduction theories. The school does not simply reproduce the dominant ideology, targeting the preservation of authority relations. The subjects involved (including parents, students and teachers), bear specific experience with socio-cultural references, that form the requirements for the development of a mutual action, that is a dialectic relation between structures and action (Lamnias, 2001).

A question emerging is whether the two concepts are compatible, meaning whether critical pedagogy can form the developmental base for intercultural education. Kaufmann (2000) maintains that often, discourse about several 'equality pedagogies', such as critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy and intercultural pedagogy, overlap, especially in the case of its more radical version. A radical intercultural education is nothing, as far as its philosophical subjects are concerned, but a form of critical pedagogy. It is about then two variants of the process to achieve educational and social equality. At the methodological level, both refer to the design and application of educational programs promoting equal opportunity, the achieving of achievement of autonomy and the strengthening of students. They adopt a critical language, they pinpoint the political nature of knowledge, learning and the educational process. (Gay, 1995:156)

Based on what has been stated thus far, we can conclude that intercultural education, starting from a critical epistemological tradition and its resulting educational and pedagogical dimensions, as defined by critical pedagogy, has the following features:

a) It has an emancipatory and transforming character. It does not restrict itself to corrective interventions within the curriculum, but rather aims at the radical transformation of the educational system (curricula, school manuals, teaching strategies, teacher training) with the perspective of societal change. Banks (1997) notes the need to transform and restructure the educational structures, teacher-student relations, school culture and much more.

b) It relates to the students' subjective needs as an outcome, a position attributing to the subject its critical-theoretical background. It is thus structured grounded on

student interests, taking into consideration their cultural capital, without being locked within some static and ahistorical perception of this culture. In this case, the aim is to structure and strengthen an identity as it is actually experienced by subjects, and not as delimited by the dominant group or the particular group.

c) It is action-oriented due to its mooring in critical pedagogy.

d) It emphasizes reflection as a reformulation, redefinition and reconstruction process underlying personal and educational assumptions.

Is Greek Educational Policy Intercultural?

Population movements, following the political developments in Eastern European countries, played an important role in the appearance of the linguistic and cultural diversity in Greek society as well, gradually but constantly evolving toward a complex multicultural configuration. Despite the fact that immigrants have been present in Greece since 1970, immigration from the 1990s on transformed Greece into a country of immigration due to the massive character of this influx.

Studying the prevailing tendencies, the laws approved and the educational measures enforced, we can distinguish a gradual shift of interest in Greek educational policy from Greek education abroad to education of repatriates in Greece, and moving from that point to the education of foreigners. Up to 1980, the focus was on Greeks overseas, despite the fact that the first foreigners had already begun arriving, in the framework of interstate agreements signed, as well as the first Greeks repatriating from abroad. Yet this element did not appear to, change the orientation of the educational system. The policy pertaining to Greeks returning to the homeland was designated 'preferential' and refers to legally granted benefits, mainly for their children to participate in various examinations (Damanakis, 1997: 64).

In the early 1980s, the number of those repatriated increased. From the late 1980s, interest focused on immigrants to Greece in mounting numbers. Reception Classes and Tutorial Classes constitute the characteristic educational measure for this period. Reception Classes constitute an educational institution, modeled after the respective classes in Germany, while their basic target is the immediate adjustment of immigrants' children to the Greek system of education, without taking into account their particular cultural capital (Nikolaou, 2000). In such classes, neither the language nor elements of the foreign students' culture are taught, despite the fact that the legislative framework leaves open the possibility for teaching their home language.

One more characteristic educational measure for this period was the establishment, beginning in the 1980s, of repatriate schools in Athens and Salonika; these aimed at a smooth incorporation of children in the normal school program over time. As a rule, this target has not been met, since the schools function under a rationale of student isolation and ghettoization (Nikolaou, 2000). These schools were attended exclusively by repatriating students from English-speaking and German-speaking countries.

It is clear that the educational measures for that period seek to offset the deficit cultural capital which the foreign students bring to bear at school. This entails a deficit assumption, which characterizes assimilative approaches: the foreign students are

considered bearers of a 'dysfunctional» cultural capital, the imminent offsetting of which will allow the acquiring of skills necessary for equal participation in the receiving society' (Damanakis, 1997). The educational system incorporates foreign students without any change in operation, thus requiring from them a superhuman effort at a personal level in order to avoid being left on the sidelines of the educational process.

1996 was a milestone year for intercultural education in Greece, marked by the enactment of Law 2413/96 for Greek Education Abroad, Intercultural Education and Other Provisions. Despite the fact that only the last article of the law explicitly refers to intercultural education, it signals a new way of viewing of educational policy for foreign students. The term 'intercultural' is introduced for the first time in official language and the multicultural aspect of the Greek society is acknowledged. Consequently, a turn is evident here in Greek educational policy through this specific law, moving from assimilation towards an intercultural approach.

However, passing the law was not accompanied by radical changes in structural features of the educational system (curriculum, operation of school units, writing of new books, personnel training). The basic development springing from Law 2413/96 concerns the establishment of so-called Intercultural Education Schools.[1] In addition, the law allows for the setting up of intercultural classes within normal schools or even the establishment of private Intercultural Education Schools by local government organizations. The criteria for converting a school to an intercultural institution remain unclear. Enrollment of a large number of foreign children is considered a necessary requirement.

Beyond the establishment of intercultural classes and schools, the particular law also involves further administrative adjustments. Important here is the establishing of the Special Secretariat for Expatriate Education and Intercultural Training within the Ministry of Education and the Institute for Expatriate Education and Intercultural Training (I.P.O.D.E.), for which staffing with specialized personnel is provided for and which is assigned a coordinating role in designing and applying training programs, teaching material production and other matters. In this way intercultural education acquired an institutional expression anchored in law, which in any case is a positive development.

This institutional presence of intercultural education allowed for the creation of four large programs for students with cultural differences, financed by the European Union.[2] Training materials, personnel training programs and research developed based on these programs, as well as a broader consideration of associated problems, which led to the development of scientific discourse about intercultural education.

In examining Greek educational policy for foreigners, one can sense an evolutionary shift from a deficit assumption to a separation approach (Damanakis, 2000). Undisputedly, law 2413/1996 signaled the change in viewing things with the

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[1]Initially, repatriate schools were renamed intercultural schools and the conversion of selected public schools followed. Today 26 such schools are in operation (13 elementary, nine lower secondary and four higher secondary schools).
[2]It is about programs "Education of Repatriated and Foreign Students", "Education of Muslim Children", "Education of Gypsy Children", and «Expatriate Education».

dominant positive element of acknowledgement, for the first time articulated officially, that Greek society is becoming multicultural. But a critical view reveals the contradictions and ambiguities in law as well as the educational policy it delimited. By its very title, its double reference is evident, a fact implying a weakness in dealing with such a matter. Its basic feature is non-clarity, since it enables intercultural schools to apply special curricula, additional or alternative courses, depending on the particular learning levels and social and cultural needs of their students, without however specifying the actual curricula or the courses. This non-clarity reflects the absence of central design and points up the presence of a fragmentary approach in the framework of which each school attempts in any way possible to cope with the particular educational and psychological needs of students with a different ethnic-cultural background.

Nevertheless, the most important element is that both the fact of establishing these schools as well as composing a separate institution for policy studies (I.P.O.D.E.) signals the choice for a separation policy along with whatever consequence that might entail. By law, intercultural education does not concern all students, but only those with 'educational, social, cultural and learning specificities'. But intercultural education, despite its different facets, is a process of mutual encounter and interaction between cultures. It is clear that this law, which forms the basic institutional framework of intercultural education in Greece, ignores or overlooks the fundamental axiom that each school is potentially intercultural. The coexistence of students with a different ethnic and cultural background in schools creates the requirements for meeting the targets of an intercultural educational policy. Yet paradoxically, this cannot occur at schools defined by law as intercultural, since they are schools with no students from the dominant Greek society. Consequently, the concept 'interculturalism' is in large part a codeword of sorts, since it requires a dynamic process of interaction and mutual recognition between individuals from different ethnic-cultural groups.

There has been realization over the past few years of the need to change the curriculum and adopt a new view of the educational process. It is about applying new programs with interdisciplinary and intercultural basic axes, which promote the general principle of amplifying cultural identity of the students in the framework of a multicultural society. The new textbooks were edited on the basis of this general principle, replacing the old ones. Despite this positive development, these advances have been fragmentary, lacking a general, clear and documented orientation. In sum, the recantations and contradictions seen during the previous period are also evident now, an indication of the lack of commitment in converting realization of the multicultural character of the society into concrete structural educational changes.

Requirements for Developing Critical Intercultural Education in Greece

Based on what has been stated, we wish to argue that at present in the Greek reality, every attempt to form a framework for effective handling of Otherness at school has failed. The arrival of thousands of repatriates and foreign students, even today, to a great extent, does not lead to any educational interventions whatsoever. This weakness in formulating a crystal-clear educational policy and the consequent weakness of the educational system to effectively handle cultural Otherness constitutes an element of a

more general weakness in the Greek educational system to change in keeping with social, cultural, economic and technological developments.

It is possible to characterize Greek educational policy as assimilative initially, putting emphasis on introducing educational measures to offset changes; more recently, there have been shifts toward incorporating elements of the foreigners' culture within the curriculum, in a way reflecting a kind of multicultural approach based on an inclusion of folkloric elements. This latter constitutes a 'prosthetic' intervention lacking any reflective process about issues of cultural identity and its composition. At the same time, the separation approach has been preserved through the existence of a parallel system, intercultural schools attended exclusively by foreigners, while this entire contradictory and ambiguous situation is imbued with a political rhetoric foregrounding a purported intercultural approach.

As a consequence, beyond political talk, no educational policy of intercultural orientation exists in Greece in practical terms, let alone a critical-reflective version of such an approach. One basic inhibiting factor here for developing such a policy is the way the dominant society is composed. The manner in which a society handles or incorporates *Otherness* is related to the values and the ideological background upon which it has been structured (Papadopoulou, 2011). This suggests that its 'permeability' is shaped and determined by the way it perceives itself, and the specific ways it differentiates itself from the ethnic Other. Consequently, one part of the difficulty in formulating an interculturally oriented educational policy is attributed to the specific nature of social composition and formation of the Greek individuality. The outcome of a series of socio-political conditions and circumstances in Greece historically had led to the development of a fragile and insecure ethnic identity, a fact reflected in the quality of relations developed by Greeks as a societal whole with ethnic and cultural Others (Triandafyllidou, 1998).

However, beyond structural difficulties, designing an intercultural educational policy requires a basic immigration policy and measures on a social level. Essential are new ideas about the recognition of rights in the Greek state and revision of the meaning of citizenship. Today, on the basis of the divide between 'us' and 'them', foreigners are deprived of fundamental rights which would allow them to participate in public life. There is a crucial need to compose a multicultural society not in the descriptive but rather the regulatory dimension of the term, which is connect to the need of democratization and formation of a policy for equal opportunity in accessing public space.

In the sphere of education, applying a critical intercultural approach would require doing away with the separation rationale of special schools as well as changes both on the macro-level of the structural characteristics of the educational system as well as the micro-level within the school class. In other words, curricula are required to promote equality of educational opportunity, school manuals assisting students to develop an intercultural outlook and teaching strategies augmenting the development of smooth intergroup relations within the school class and cooperation and strengthening relations between students and teachers. Fundamental is also the issue of training teaching staff for intercultural education and its concrete challenges in implementation.

The shift from the two approaches currently adopted, i.e. the "separative" policy of special intercultural schools on one hand, and the "additive" approach of enhancement

of the curriculum with elements drawn from the culture of foreign pupils on the other, is the main precondition for the formulation of a critical intercultural approach to the Greek educational system. In Greek classrooms, there are foreign pupils, second generation immigrants who do not identify exclusively with the respective countries of origin[3]. In reality, this means that the starting point of each educational approach with intercultural perspective, must be the direct experience of native and foreign pupils, so as to not be entrapped in the reproduction of an identity which is not related to the one experienced by the pupils. The children in Greek schools are not the impersonal representatives of an ethnic group. Any assumption of this kind merely represents a stereotypic perception of their presence by the dominant group, which does not permit school to approach the direct experience of the children. These children set up a new "hybrid" identity, which is different than both the Greek identity as well as the identity of the respective country of origin that the Greek school cannot ignore.

As regards the general purpose of the educational system, the issue related to its revisal and reorientation must be set on the table. The recognition of the multicultural composition of the social framework calls into question the monocultural nature of education. The Greek educational system, on the level of general objectives, must be oriented towards the cultivation of a comprehensive – intercultural identity of the pupils, that will allow them to harmoniously coexist with the others, on the basis of recognition and acceptance. This signifies that the development of a critical intercultural approach requires a shift from an ethnocentric and monocultural educational approach to a multi-perspective approach which allows viewing matters from many different cultural angles. The multi-perspective approach allows pupils, both foreign and native, to understand the relative nature of their own perspective, to confront their tradition, to challenge self-evident admissions and to be led to a critical stand towards their own culture and the culture of others.

Thus, a curriculum is required which will clearly challenge the dominant ethnic Paradigm, while at the same time not be structured on the rationale of cultural differences, which can contribute to the preservation of ethnic boundaries. This does not mean that the school ignores the fact that each pupil has a specific history, specific experiences drawn from specific cultural representations. Nevertheless, the acknowledgment of the existence of a given culture does not signify neither its delimitation, nor the belittlement of the others. The pupils must communicate critically with all ethnic and cultural environments of provenance of the other pupils, while at the same time being able to preserve, reshape or reject their own. Thus, educational practices must be promoted, which lead to a critical contemplation of collective identities, both their own as well as that of others, through a reflective critical approach.

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[3]The process of acculturation studied by Berry (1997) is neither single-defined nor one-dimensional. The orientation of the foreign child and the course of setting up an identity, is the result of a composite procedure in which many factors are involved.

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