How to keep multicultural education alive (Selected theoretical and practical suggestions)

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Abstract:

Current political conflicts, the rising number of protests against immigrants (manifested, e.g., by the construction of walls at the Hungarian and Slovenian border), the huge number of political refugees in Europe and the quest to find reasons for the latest terrorist attacks in Paris have reopened the debate about efficient multicultural education in public schools. In this paper, I will discuss the importance of Rawls' principle of distributive justice and Honneth/Fraser's principle of just recognition, as well as Lynch and Lodge's 3R criteria for an inclusive school/society (*Redistribution, Recognition* and *Representation*). I will present the thesis that the liberal *principle of just distribution* of public resources should be supplemented with proper recognition of minority student groups and their integration in decision-making processes. I will emphasise the role of a comprehensive educational approach and the incorporation of selected artistic experiences in multicultural education in making us aware of our personal limitations to accepting another person as different (or other) but still valuable and worthy of participating in common relations and activities. Finally, I will present some examples of how artistic experiences reveal and transform our attitudes towards otherness and social differences.

Key words: comprehensive educational approach, distributive justice, multicultural education through artistic experiences, recognition, representation

Introduction

Multicultural education is the field of pedagogical approaches and educational practices that deals with identity politics. A more precise definition of the term depends on our understanding of 'politics' and its core concepts like *justice, democracy, human rights,* etc. Some contemporary educational theorists, like Biesta (2013), strongly deny any value in thinking of education as a form of identity development, since the idea of identity is strongly connected with social representations of images of the self, while the political dimensions of education should enable individuals or groups of citizens to 'step into the world' as subjects. The goal of education, according to Biesta (ibid.), is 'subjectification' and not 'socialization' – the term usually used for identity development.

In this paper, I would like to point out some basic questions and controversies associated with multicultural education as well as offer some practical suggestions to provoke discussion about our attitudes towards otherness and social differences in artistic experiences. In my discussion of political theories, I will focus on the division between two principles of justice: Rawls' *principle of distributive justice* and Honneth/Fraser's *principle of just recognition*, and on Lynch and Lodge's 3R criteria for an inclusive school/society (*Redistribution, Recognition,* and *Representation*). All educational politics affecting minority groups of students (for example, migrants and indigenous students, LGBT (lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals) students and poor or handicapped students) are strongly connected to our fears, feelings of discomfort, or even scapegoating, exclusionary practices. Therefore, I will argue that the liberal *principle of just distribution* of public resources should be supplemented with proper recognition of minority student groups and their integration in decision-making processes. I will emphasize the role of a comprehensive educational approach and the use of selected artistic experiences in multicultural education in helping us become aware of our personal limitations to accepting another person as different (or other) but still valuable and worthy of participating in common relations and activities.

The importance of redistribution, recognition, and representation

Since the 1970s, Rawls' concept of distributive justice has been the main criteria of justice to evaluate school systems, e.g., to measure whether they ensure just opportunities for all children to get an education and participate socially. Just opportunities for every child – together with the principle of positive discrimination – have also become the basic political criteria for evaluating the results of international literacy tests (PISA, TIMMS, PIRLS etc.) and the dominant measure of justice in national strategic plans for educational development (see, e.g., two White papers on education in Slovenia published in 1995 and 2011). What remained in doubt (especially regarding compensatory programs for migrants and special ethnic groups like Roma children as a measure of educational

policies that ensure positive discrimination for marginalized people) was whether this concept of justice was primarily a way to help immigrant children be more successful in school systems and thus in society or whether it was, rather, a form of assimilative force to socialize immigrants – not only children and youngsters, but also their parents – so-called 'socialization-in-reverse' (Furedi, 2009).

In the 1990s, it became evident that not all kinds of social injustice originate in the limited economic opportunities that can be best reduced by applying the social measures of Rawls' criteria of fair opportunities and positive discrimination. According to Fraser (2003) and Bingham (2001), identity issues, which can also be obstacles to social success, cannot be healed primarily by Rawlsian tools of just social politics. European and American cultures have a long tradition of *scapegoating* selected cultural groups like Jews, African-Americans, Gypsies and Muslims (Kearney, 2003). Some evasion strategies used in these cases are improper/discriminatory recognition patterns of cultural domination (the request for assimilation), invisibility (situation without recognition) or disrespectful recognition (selected identity characteristics are interpreted as negative according to 'normalization discourses') (Bingham, 2001). Proper recognition includes three important concepts: affirmation of the person in dialogue (ibid.), awareness of improper cultural forms of recognition (discrimination) (Buttler, 1997) and mutual responsibility for proper representation of all involved in a dialogue (recognition of the other's agency) (Benjamin, 1988).

Similar ideas for building a just culture in school and politics were described by Lynch and Lodge in their study *Equality and Power in Schools: Redistribution, Recognition, and Representation* (2002). Since inequality in education has at least three major generative roots: socio-culturally-based systems of recognition, non-recognition and misrecognition; realms of decision-making in systems of inclusion or exclusion as the exercise of power; and socio-economic systems in terms of patterns of ownership, control, distribution and consumption (ibid), Lynch and Lodge proposed the 3R criteria for a just school community: *redistribution, recognition and representation*. Rawls, Fraser, and Bingham defined the concepts of redistribution and recognition as described in previous paragraph, but the criteria of representation is new issue focusing on the improper inclusion of pupils in decision-making processes:

> Political or *representational injustice* occurs when and wherever power is enacted, in the realms of decision-making, including policy-making, and in political life generally. It may take the form of political exclusion, political marginalization, political trivialization or political misrepresentation (Young, 1990). In schools, power is a core equality problematic as it is imbricated in all social relations... Promoting equality in the exercise of power requires changes in the way power is exercised 'over' students and 'over' particular teachers and parents. It requires changes in the procedures for the representation of interests by all parties to

the education process, so that subordinate voices can be heard and heeded. It requires the introduction of new structures for dialogue, and changes in attitudes that trivialize and disregard the political interests of the 'other'. (ibid, pp. 172-173)

The proper representation of students is therefore a question of their subjectification, which is, according to Biesta, a step beyond the 'mere' just distribution of goods and recognition, since it means 'the experience of being addressed' to speak and make decisions for yourself (Biesta, 2012).

But Lynch and Lodge emphasize one more important dimension of 'just and inclusive education': '…schooling relations are relations of dependency and interdependency that are deeply affective in character'. (ibid, p. 173) A similar conclusion can be found in the study *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: interpreting otherness,* by R. Kearney (2003), who blames our unconscious fears for our tendency to exclude people who are radically different from us:

> …we often project onto others those unconscious fears from which we recoil in ourselves. Rather than acknowledge that we are deep down answerable to an alterity which unsettles us, we devise all kinds of evasion strategies. Primary amongst these is the attempt to simplify our existence by scapegoating others as 'aliens'. So doing, we contrive to transmute the sacrificial alien into a monster, or into a fetish-god. But either way, we refuse to recognize the stranger before us as a singular other who responds, in turn, to the singular otherness in each of us. We refuse to acknowledge ourselves-as-others. (ibid, p. 5)

We may conclude that in order to change the patterns of redistribution, recognition, and representation of marginalized pupils or students, our attitudes towards the otherness of Jews, Muslims, Roma and poor and handicapped persons must change. How to achieve this goal is one of the most important pedagogical questions in multicultural education.

Education through art as an inductive approach

Theories of education that originated in Enlightenment ethics and political theories did not focus on affective and emotional problems with accepting differences among individuals or social groups. According to Kant, an ethical subject must develop courage and cognitive skills to be expected to act in accordance with a general ethical principle – a *categorical imperative* (Kant, 1784). Since Rawls' distributive theory of justice originates in Kantian ethics, Rawls' critique points out the relational character of ethical judgement, which focuses on the impact of an ethical or political subject on people and the social and natural environment as well as on the construction of one's personal meaning of life. According to Levinas (2006), a responsible moral orientation is therefore not a consequence of the

contemplative moral reasoning of an autonomous person ('under the veil of ignorance', as J. Rawls presupposes in his *Theory of Justice* (1971)), but a respectful dialogue, evoked by the face of another person (Kroflič, 2009). In the last two decades, several educational theories – or, as we call them in continental Europe, pedagogies – have been developed in this field, among which relational pedagogy (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004), dialogic pedagogy (Matusov, 2009) and the pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi, 2006) are the best known in international academic circles.

All of them emphasized the insight that the basic element of education is a relationship. But since '…relations are not necessarily good … Domination is as relational as love' (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p. 7), E. Matusov (2009) proposed the idea that dialogue is the basic element of education. Matusov (2009) and Rinaldi (2006) said that listening to the other person, openness to surprise and the maintenance of an ontologically engaged relationship between students and teachers are some distinct features of dialogic education and genuine dialogue.

A *comprehensive inductive educational approach* to education originates from this idea of education as a relationship or dialogue (Kroflič, 2011 and Kroflič, 2011a). Its basic structure is as follows: children are capable of establishing relationships of love and friendship in the first years of their lives – even if ethical consciousness requires more complex cognitive abilities. Therefore, a pedagogical approach that is built upon these relationships enables the child to develop relational response-ability and normative agency in the most authentic way. The next important step is to develop the child's sense of respect towards specific persons or activities, because personally engaged relationships may also be harmful if they lead to empathic over-arousal, empathic bias, pity or paternalism. The third step in moral education is to become aware of ethical principles and humanistic demands, especially concerning human rights and ecological values, and to learn how to use them as a basis for democratic negotiation in interpersonal conflicts (Kroflič, 2011a).

Education through artistic experiences is one of the important tools of the *comprehensive inductive educational approach*. Aristotle (2005) proposed two crucial ways of reaching truth and the meaning of life: *philosophy* and *art*. If the first one uses deduction to explain the meaning of human and natural events, art (especially tragedy) can reach the same goal through precise and sensitive observation and narrative descriptions of singular events. Stories can be described as illustrations of diverse events in life depicting the connections among human desires, decisions and actions and demonstrating different consequences, which range from tragic to fulfilling, from evil to good. Thus, narrations bestow practical wisdom, connecting the context of individual events to their consequences from an ethical perspective. They are important to us because of tradition or prior personal experience. The deeply felt processing of an artistic depiction of an event falls somewhere between the transfer of tradition and personal experience, because on the one hand, a work of art depicts a virtuous or vicious act, while on

the other hand, our compassion towards the agent and the event creates a prototype of an imaginary inductive experience (Kroflič, 2015).

Different authors offer different explanations for why artistic experience can be an important educational tool for developing more respectful and responsible relationships. Nussbaum emphasises compassionate imagination (1977), and Arendt focuses on enlarged thought through imagination and storytelling (1989) However, both these authors emphasise the educational and political importance of the artistic narration (Disch, 1993). Therefore, it is worth mentioning that the narrative method has become a popular tool in feminist and post-colonial studies to give voices to socially marginalized groups of people and to enable recognition of their social positions and political emancipation.

Following the same logic, *education through artistic experiences* also became a crucial element of the *comprehensive inductive educational approach*:

> Empathizing with artistic hero or her/his act, compassion with her/his destiny, abolishing ego phantasies about us as a centre of the world, reflection of events which may never happen to me, capacity to create visions about possible worlds that eliminate selfishness and injustice – all this are capacities of imagination that deepen our ethical consciousness. (Kroflič, 2007a, p. 8)

So it can be concluded that the development of imagination through listening and storytelling is one of the most powerful pedagogic or therapeutic tools for triggering self-awareness and responsible relationships with others. It is also useful in multicultural education, especially for reducing fears about cultural differences, establishing respectful forms of *recognition* and promoting processes of *just representation* and *subjectification* of marginalized children and students.

Examples of multicultural education for different age groups of students

One further argument for using stories in intercultural education is that even a pre-school child can empathise with the characters and feel emotionally affected by their troubles and successes. This feature of storytelling relates to Aristotle's (2005) concept of *catharsis,* which is one of the first depictions of transformative educational experiences. Today, cathartic emotions still have a strong educational and even therapeutic power (Kroflič, 2011a & Kroflič, 2015).

There are various opportunities to use different artistic media in multicultural education at all levels of education. The next paragraph gives some examples of how to implement multicultural education with children and students of different ages. These examples are based on experiences over the last few years, during which the *comprehensive educational approach* was tested in the kindergarten Vodmat in Ljubljana, at the University of Ljubljana and in the city art cinema Kinodvor in Ljubljana.

Project: 'The Other' at Kindergarten Vodmat, Ljubljana, Slovenia

While implementing the *comprehensive inductive educational approach*, we experimented with storytelling using various artistic media such as literature, dance and visual arts. In the international project *European Multiple Choice Identity,* one of the five topics was the relationship of pre-school children to the 'other' (Kroflič, 2011). In one of the classes, 3 to 5-year-old children were introduced to different cultural and religious traditions through learning about their classmates' New Year's celebrations. They gathered information about different cultures from stories about their parents and grand-parents, books and imaginary journeys on a flying carpet around the world. They also visited different churches in Ljubljana and, with their parents, they prepared typical festive dinners and selected music and dances from their own cultural heritage. The project finished with the organisation of a 'world-view market place' where every group of children prepared a cultural presentation using drama, dancing and singing, a food stand and a brick with cartoons on it depicting information about the culture. The children used these bricks to build a 'tower of differences'.

Lecture on metaphors of exclusion of the other for students of pedagogy and andragogy at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Another example of teaching cultural differences comes from my work with students of pedagogy and andragogy at the School of Arts, University of Ljubljana. In the course on special needs students, the discriminatory impact of historic metaphors on mentally retarded people in the Western European tradition was discussed. The basic source of information on this topic is art – from ancient Greek tragedy (*Medeia*) and modern novels (*Don Quixote*) to the visual arts. As described in Foucault's study *Madness & Civilization (A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason)*, I discussed the three main metaphors of exclusion, *the leper*, *the court fool* and *the noble savage* (Kroflič, 2007), using three well-known works of art: the engraving of Brant's satire *Narrenschiff*, Bosch's painting *The Ship of Fool* and Gauguin's painting *Vairaumati*.

I consider it essential to help students recognize the turbulent history of changes in attitudes toward sexual and cultural otherness and differences in mental abilities. It started in antiquity as an ambivalent attitude toward the barbarian but ethical woman Medeia, continued in late medieval period in the

brutality of excommunicating insane people (along with lepers), and it continues in the modern and even postmodern era as a seemingly enthusiastic attitude towards uncivilized people in an innocent, natural state. What we usually forget is that

> …the impression that the figure of The Noble Savage remained the figure of otherness beyond our own world: the figure of the native as an ideal object of tourist attraction in which the civilized man of the twentieth century seeks the remains of the 'unspoiled nature' in both physical and cultural senses of the word." (Kroflič, 2007, p.37)

Under the veil of positive fascination with, for example, Romany culture, we find an attitude of distance:

> The fact that the discourse of medicine readily recognizes Romany children as children with special needs (Save the Children, 2001) is masked by the cliché of a romantic, indigenous culture of music and dance. Even more – the true Romany musician should be, according to this illusion, incapable of reading musical scores (supposedly the basis of civilized achievement in musical art), which makes him an example of natural musicianship coming directly 'from the heart'. (ibid., p. 38)

Multicultural topics in the city art cinema Kinodvor, Ljubljana, Slovenia

The last project on multicultural education I want to present was done in cooperation with public primary schools and the city art cinema Kinodvor in Ljubljana. Since movies, along with music, are one of the most popular forms of media with children and teenagers, a program of high-quality movies was presented to young audiences. In the program, called *Kinobalon*, experts in Kinodvor selected movies appropriate for young audiences of varying ages, prepared pedagogical materials for teachers dealing with the topics brought up by the movies and organized discussions and workshops for children and teenagers after the movies were shown (Slatinšek & Kelbl, 2015).

The project's underlying philosophy is as follows:

> We understand every viewing as a creative act of building the film's meaning. Watching films is active (as opposed to often heard passive action) because it importantly affects our experience – of ourselves, others and film as such. In addition to the wide variety of the film program screened in the cinema, the key element of film education is reflection and its articulation…
> The aim of film education is to help develop a sensitive viewer…

We therefore believe that in the process of reflection it is crucial to encourage children to explore and describe their own personal experience. We establish a dialogue with them and avoid giving the impression that there is a right or a wrong answer to questions. The questions are the starting points for a dialogue which is unpredictable and in which children and adults have an equally important role. We take children seriously and in the discussion encourage them to listen to each other, consider different opinions on and experiences of the film and learn to express and argue them. This process leads to an increasingly greater capability of expressing thoughts about cinema – 'the translation of a film into speaking about a film'. And because watching a film is a creative process, children thereby get to know themselves and other children and take a stand in relation to the film's content and the world presented by the film. (ibid., pp. 7-8)

This quotation illustrates the main goals of the project: 1) to create a sensitive viewer and 2) to create a person who is willing and able to reflect on a movie as well as his/her own experiences in reference to the movie's topics. This project offers two important approaches to multicultural education: 1) the close and careful observation of stories addressing multicultural topics and 2) the possibility to reflect on the same story from different points of view. The latter addresses the different personal histories of the participants in a discussion.

The authors of this project (ibid.) are aware of the many different potential approaches to discussing films, e.g., the aesthetic, formal, structural, psychological, sociological, philosophical, historic, feminist and cultural approaches and those related to media analysis and film criticism, but they emphasize that

…the central junction of these various approaches must nevertheless be grounded in a child's direct experience of a film as such and must proceed from it if we want the children to develop their own views. Only then can we arouse their curiosity with the diversity of other views, that is, if this view is one of many and not the only right one. (ibid., p. 10)

To expand on this approach, we formulated some basic principles for leading discussions or workshop activities after a movie showing and presented them to the directors of kindergartens and public schools in Slovenia:

- We do not explain the meaning of the movie to children or suggest its proper meaning.
- We motivate children to watch accurately and defend their opinions and explanations.
- We encourage children to be tolerant listeners and to accept different views and interpretations.

- Children formulate potential interpretations on their own. If we see that the audience did not notice an important part of the story, we remind disputants about it and encourage them to think and consider its importance.
- The most important issues are the child's experience, his/her compassionate imagination of the story and its actors and the child's ability to express her/his personal feelings and what he/she has learned through storytelling, drawing, film making, dramatization, symbolic game, dance, etc. (Kroflič & Kelbl, 2012)

Conclusion

Current trends in the media and political speeches on the refugee crisis in Europe tend towards the language of 'objective reporting', discussing this event like a natural catastrophe. Politicians and journalists report 'new waves of refugees' that should be directed through legal 'channels' to western European counties. It is likely that non-governmental volunteer organizations are the most successful, since they focus on personal destinies of people who are forced to leave their countries.

Watching a movie is – like other artistic events – an experience which can, through personal compassionate imagination and the perception of different views on narration, expand our understanding of the depicted topics. When we teach children and students to better understand multicultural events, we have to use different fundamental theories. As I argued in this paper, the criteria of *just redistribution, recognition* and *representation* can be one such theory. When we observe this concept through the lens of Biesta's idea of *subjectification* as one of the most important goals of general education, we see that special social conditions are necessary for subjectification. These conditions can take different forms for socially marginalized groups. Rawls called these conditions the *principle of positive discrimination*, and Lynch and Lodge called them the *principle of just representation*.

However, in my opinion, the concept of *proper and just recognition* should be seen as the underlying principle of both *positive discrimination* and *representation*, since our readiness to help people in need and to admit their basic human rights depends on our perception of them and attitude towards them. In conclusion, it can be claimed that developing a proper attitude towards the otherness of marginalized people is one of the most important goals of teacher education as well as multicultural education in kindergartens and schools. It can be successfully achieved through *the inductive practice of education through arts.*

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