

From Intercultural Education to Diversity Management in France and in Europe: What Prospects? ¹

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Abstract

While it was very popular in France in the 80's, Intercultural Education has slowly disappeared since then due to the decrease in the number of migrant children. The situation is the same for multicultural education in other European countries. However, intercultural and multicultural studies continue to grow. Indeed, if intercultural no longer interests educators, managers and human resources managers are looking more and more in that direction.

Summarising the studies conducted in France and Europe in the field of intercultural education, we will try to draw some main operating principles that can inform future practices that may emerge on to other continents currently living migratory waves comparable to those known in Europe. We will then analyze the shift from a preoccupation for "living together", related to the integration of migrant children, to a managerial preoccupation related to the need to "work together", associated with the internationalization of companies.

From the treatment of otherness in schools to diversity management in the workplace environment, we will review the main issues raised by these practices: What practical applications arise from studies in intercultural education and in diversity management? What are their goals and their consequences? What excesses are carried by the implementation of such actions?

We will attempt to answer these questions by relying on a review of recent literature as well as examples of implemented actions.

School, as an institution, has an important role to play regarding future citizens' education. It must promote values like respect for diversity and opening to otherness. Yet, in French schools, intercultural education has disappeared after the Islamic veil's affair and regular complaints from teachers requiring less heterogeneous classes. Those issues are symptomatic of a general lack of thinking when it comes to diversity.

If school is a good reflection of society, we have some good reasons to worry facing the rise of political extremisms. In front of the rise of nationalisms, it seems more than ever necessary to find solutions to help future generations to

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better accept and to understand all diversity forms, in brief, to create a pluralistic society. School's actors must think of new solutions to avoid hostile reactions against others.

From intercultural education in schools to issues regarding diversity management in corporations, we will try to answer those questions: how can we improve otherness consideration while considering individual rights? How can we stop to instrumentalize other cultures? How can diversity become an asset for any modern society?

Beginning with the definition of the main terms related to intercultural education, this paper will then review the various phases that French laic republican school have passed during the last 40 years regarding cultural diversity. Then "education for global and multicultural citizenship" that emerged in Quebec a few years ago will be discussed. Finally, diversity in business world will be questioned.

Intercultural education: definitions

According to Clanet (1993), education is the action of an adult in charge of a child, aiming to help him to develop physically, intellectually or morally and to favor his integration in society. This definition shows that any educational solution must be adapted for the society where the child lives. Therefore, even the best educational methods in one culture may be wrong if applied in another culture. Intercultural implies reciprocity in exchanges and complexity in cultural relations. Intercultural involves a relation and a dialogue between different cultures, through people (Giraud, 1995). Interculturality would be all the processes - psychic, relational, of a group, institutional - generated by cultures' interactions in a relationship of mutual exchanges and in the perspective, for each partners, to preserve a relative cultural identity. (Clanet, 1993, p. 21). It indicates a particular mode of interactions and interrelations, occurring when different cultures come into contact, as well as all the changes and transformations resulting from repeated or prolonged contacts.

Intercultural refers to culture in his ethno psychological meaning: that means, culture as a particular relationship to the world of a particular group - with its standards, its values, possibly its lifestyles, its language, its rites, etc. - all these elements being transmitted by the group and constituting its cultural identity. Thus, the most important thing is invisible (standards and values) whereas external and visible aspects of culture matters less. In other words, intercultural focuses on culture as a particular worldview, a specific universe of meanings according to a particular group, which includes the sense given to things and the beliefs it stands. At the same time, it places an individual in a particular community. It is also important to underline the changing character of any culture. Because each of us appropriates and interprets our own culture according to who we are, our story, our education and living place, we must acknowledge that no culture is static. Finally, intercultural education can be defined as all actions aiming at creating positive relations of interaction and understanding between pupils with various cultures.

We all live in modern societies that can't be seen as closed and hermetic anymore. Even the most protective community has got to admit they are now composed of several cultures: this co-presence must be considered as a chance as much as a necessity and it is advisable to take advantage of this situation of multicultural wealth by

granting to each culture a place, without being afraid of having something to lose but by taking the bet that we have more to gain if we adopt an open attitude.

Intercultural education is a dialectical project that consists in assuring respect for differences although the aim is to outstrip those differences. It also aims at thinking about differences as well as resemblances between one and others. While conducting a work of deep thinking, decentering and metacognition about his own cultural identity and its role in individual construction of self, the individual is placed in the center of the intercultural experiment.

Researchers has long agreed on the fact that contact between people from different cultural backgrounds are not sufficient to speak about intercultural action. Indeed, individuals from different cultures mix every day without necessarily entering into a relationship. Thus, school must work hard to allow pupils to exchange and communicate about their culture and identity.

In 1993, Page declined seven currents of thought about intercultural education. We will only refer to the five more prevalent here.

The first one is the current of cultures' knowledge, which intends "to develop harmonious relations between members of various ethnic groups".

The second one is referred to as the "heterocentrism" current and consists in trying to destroy stereotypes and dominant groups' supremacy by means of acknowledging scientific discoveries about the non-existence of race. It is undoubtedly the most difficult work that needs to be done because stereotypes are so firmly rooted. This work hasn't been done in French schools because of its secular tradition, which implies that racial categorization cannot be evoked.

The third current is called isolationist and tries to value patrimonial languages and minority cultures in schools with separate activities for children from minorities. Here, the aim is to preserve distinctive identities. Researchers have demonstrated the ineffectiveness of this kind of educational activities due to the separation of majority and minority children.

The fourth current is the antiracist. It aims at favoring discriminations' criticism both in institutions and society. This current is little represented in France even if it is undoubtedly essential.

Finally, the civics current aims at "promoting a practical education in human rights and democratic values". This approach allows establishing a standard of xenophilia, which appears to be the only guarantee we have for everyone to be fully respected by others.

The main issue, regarding intercultural education in France, is that these various currents, instead of complementing each other, have been replaced one by one, following the actuality and depending on what seemed to be the most urgent to cure. It now seems important to find a way to reconcile these various approaches. But before that, it seems necessary to make an historical detour.

Secular and republican school facing the intercultural challenge

Intercultural education's arrival in French schools, as well as all the changes it has been through, is bound to a series of redefinition of school goals.

For a long time, schools' role has been to transmit children republican values, to help them become good citizens, to assimilate them and to cement the national community: "to ensure the cohesion of society, better control the social entity and bring the nation to the foreground". (Obin and Obin-Coulon, 1999, p. 108.)

Traditionally, French school, in the name of secularism, invites each child to leave aside its specific cultural characteristics in exchange for the access to the universal and to citizenship. The aim is thus standardization. This tendency answered above all to a concern of justice and equality but also to a need to promote and to protect the social consensus. These politics of education were considered, rightly, as assimilationists.

During post-war economic boom, the access to employment has prevailed in the all society and, quite logically, within schools. As the labor society appeared, its role was to organize the access to the social hierarchy on the basis of school merit and to classify and guide pupils in their job choices. 1975's crisis has sharpened this role, which has evolved into an obligation to sort out and to exclude.

Today, the tendency is on the way back for the role which prevailed under the third republic: allow all the children to access to rational knowledge and to build unity on the basis of citizenship, to transform each and every child in a citizen carrying the common culture and to give him the basic knowledge he needs to live in a modern society. There is now a need to define what this common culture is, but it is precisely this necessary work of in-depth reflection that seems, even today, difficult to do.

Secularism and diverse cultural codes in schools

So, French school can be considered as assimilationist by tradition and it is only recently that it began to take interest in minority cultures, based on the right to be different. Right now French school still needs to find the right balance between two tendencies although it never has stopped looking for it in the last forty years, oscillating between the respect for secular tradition and acceptance, recognition and opening to minority cultures.

The French school has often felt that its secularism was being threatened, for actual reasons or not. The Islamic veil's affair that took place in middle and high schools is a good example of this. For the first time in 1989, a middle school head teacher forbade young girls to wear Islamic veils inside its establishment, in the name of secularism. The repetition of similar situations led, in March 2004, to the promulgation of a Law forbidding to wear conspicuous religious symbols in State schools. In the same vein, the question of an education on Religions' history is widely debated. Yet, it is important to remind that the respect for religious pluralism and for disbelief does not mean the complete lack of consideration for members of religious orders in school's regulation, but it does mean that all that is related to religion is optional and unofficial, which is widely different (Bauderot, 1990). The fact is, regarding

children's cultures, school reacted depending on events, that is, in urgency, and without long-term reflection. The consequence has been less efficiency of intercultural projects that were impulse locally and on a piecemeal basis.

The necessary work on stereotypes

Stereotypes can be defined as motionless characteristics or images that are attributed to a human group. They are known to be one of the main obstacles to communication and exchange between individuals from different cultures. Every individual carries some of these images that he first began to build about his membership group. Only after he will begin to build stereotypes about other groups. Our representation about other cultures is made by pre constructed judgments that keeps us from a more objective knowledge. It thus appears logical that intercultural actions aim at deconstructing stereotypes about the out groups.

Certain pedagogues recommend that this work on stereotypes only begin in high school because it is a difficult work that implies to analyze and to decenter from our own point of view. On the contrary, we can fear that if the stereotypes issue is discuss too late, stereotypes would be too deeply rooted and therefore difficult to modify. According to Lorcerie (1985) it is necessary to work as soon as possible on ethno centrist's ideas and child's pre-racist stereotypes. But one major obstacle is that the work on stereotypes needs time. Indeed, only an in-depth, progressive and long work, can allow real changes. In French schools, intercultural actions never last long enough to implement a real change in paradigm. Furthermore, their evaluation remains problematic.

Intercultural education, its limits and deficiencies

The first intercultural actions were implemented to help migrants' children who were believed to have more difficulties than others, particularly in term of integration. The question could have been: because children in general (and lots of adults too) have difficulties to accept and to understand diversity and otherness, it is necessary to help them to open up to these notions. Everything would have been radically different, not only on a symbolic level but also for practical applications.

We already saw the purposes and theoretical objectives of intercultural education as well as its applications in school practice. One thing is clear: the application reveals a strong gap between declarations of intent and reality. Indeed, intercultural education was often limited to the knowledge of lifestyles on their most concrete level (clothing, food, housing environment, language) skipping explanations and understanding of values that underlie every culture and thus, fixing the cultures rather than considering them as in perpetual change.

For many years, intercultural activities were tinged with folklorism because school teachers were not trained to analyze cultural issues. Activities were centered on discovering other manners to dress, to feed or on artistic practices that come from abroad. The presence of folkloric intercultural practices in schools could be due to the lack of bridges between intercultural education on a theoretical level and its application on a more concrete level.

If the intercultural activities have often been reduced, as Abdallah-Pretceille regrets it, to demonstrations most immediately perceptible (cooking, crafts, dances, celebrations), it is likely because teachers were lacking tools, time

and money and especially didn't have any appropriate training. One of the solutions sketched to tackle these difficulties was to engage associations with cultural vocation or parents to intervene in schools, but it only strengthened the impression of folklore.

Other reproaches were addressed to intercultural education such as its tendency to look down on minorities' cultures, the tendency to stigmatize, the ethnic based division in schools and the risk of reinforcing stereotypes. De Smet and Rasson (1993) have highlighted the main traps for intercultural practices. The most frequent is to objectify cultures, the intercultural approach suggesting that culture is a coherent and identifiable set that gives us information on people. The theorization is not exempt from criticism, the main one being its unmistakably ideological and emotional aspect, which hinders objectivity.

In 1995, Abdallah-Preteuille regretted the fact that intercultural education was too much related to migrants' children's presence at school and dreaded the end of intercultural education. About two decades later, it seems that her concerns were well founded. Nowadays, there is not a single French school referring to intercultural education and young teachers have never heard about it.

Education for global and multicultural citizenship

In 1997, a report to Quebec Minister of Education considered that, "in such a pluralistic society, school has to strengthen social cohesion. It has to contribute in search of common values based on common reasons, to prepare for the exercise of citizenship, for the integration in a common culture and in a preservation of opportunities' equality. Education for citizenship can be understood as one foundation of democratic school's global mission."

In the years that followed, CEICI's² practitioners and researchers have worked on the emergence of a notion that could be able to include various educational currents. They have called it "Education for global and multicultural citizenship". This notion includes the themes of antiracism, intercultural education, developmental education, human rights' education, peace education and environmental education. It favors the systemic educational approaches, project-based teaching and cooperative education and has given itself the objective to allow children to acquire skills (knowledge and experiments) and to develop most relevant attitudes to live in modern societies.

It seems possible and desirable to consider for each particular country a model of education for children that would be similar to this one. To implement such a project, the following principles can be retained.

In terms of contents it seems important to keep the ideas of learning how to live with others, knowing different cultures, respecting rights as well as duties, identities issues and understanding the world in which we live in with all its diversity. According to Riondet (1996) this kind of education could be defined as an educational act that needs to construct learning situations that would allow each pupil to understand the world that surrounds him.

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In terms of educational and teaching goals, it can be interesting to keep the following aspects: acquire knowledge, develop attitudes and behavior in agreement with common values, be transverse and multidisciplinary, the importance of a long-term work, methods such as active pedagogies, project's pedagogy, cooperative learning, differentiated pedagogy and allow each pupil to work on stereotypes and representations. Finally, it would be necessary to favor the initial and lifelong training for teachers according to these various points.

Diversity: from educational environment to the business world

While in the educational world, researchers and teachers have been speaking in terms of "reaching a better understanding between individuals", in the business world, managers have been speaking about "managing diversity", the main objective being to increase gains and to improve efficiency.

Ross and Schneider (1992), consider that diversity policies in business would be justified at the same time by economic and moral arguments. If the diversity contains some advantages in terms of cognitive and social resources, innovation, creativity and networks, it also arouses numerous interpersonal problems connected to stereotypes and prejudices.

According to Jackson and Joshi (2004), stereotypes may generate distrust, favoritism and discrimination among heterogeneous team members, then divide them to the point to engender interpersonal conflicts and affect team performance. Team cohesion is indeed usually favored by common characteristics shared by its members (Spataro, 2003).

It seems relevant to search for cohesive factors in a multicultural working team. Festinger (1950), demonstrated that cohesion in a group or a working team is "the result of the mutual desire of team members to belong to the same group, of their pride to be a member of it and their motivation to maintain an active participation". In other words, it is the degree of attraction of the group, and its members' will to stay in this particular group.

Numerous factors contribute to group cohesion. Szilagyi and Wallace (1983) identified ten factors that may favor the cohesion in a working team, among which group homogeneity, interactions' frequency, the absence of ingroup competition and the small size of the group. In most modern companies, regardless of location, it becomes more and more improbable to succeed in constituting working teams that are homogeneous from the point of view of their cultural characteristics. But it should not be too hard to work on interactions' frequency, the absence of ingroup competition and to reduce teams size.

Education for global and multicultural citizenship model also seems perfectly relevant in working life. It seems desirable to favor actions promoting a better living together inside companies. When most intercultural management seminars only propose a basic knowledge about various cultures, as if cultures were motionless and homogeneous, there is good reasons to work on trainings that would favor dialogue and mutual understanding, in an environment providing the first condition to accept diversity: the xenophilia. Yet, it seems difficult to ask employees to accept and to understand others if the society in general does not favor diversity understanding.

Conclusion

Relying on a long experience in intercultural education, it is possible to conceive a contents and a frame allowing to favor intercultural understanding and dialogue both at school and inside companies. While these two institutions are fully connected to the society in which they are located, they must also be expanding values that guarantee pupils and employees to work in an enabling environment for the expression of their talent and their personal and social identity.

The school should not be hermetic to events that take place inside the whole society. But it also has to be the place of rationalism and as such it should be able to take a step back from current events. To change school's goals every five years, always raising the same issues (teachers training, risks of drift, contained and educational methods) may be seen as inefficient. It appears a better choice to define the outlines of an educational project (didactic and educational) and the widest possible contents to help children to cope with life in the current world.

The school must educate children on issues regarding intercultural, citizenship, development, human rights, peace and, why not, working world, because all these notions form the human being in his various meanings.

The intercultural dimension allows to understand complexity in context and to take into account lots of parameters (individual, groups, social). It represents a systemic approach that is necessary to have a global vision on various problems. It also allows to question otherness, the "other" in its both unique and universal aspects.

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