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Multicultural education: focus on context

MUZEUM HISTORII POLSKI

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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: FOCUS ON CONTEXT

Abstract

Kincheloe & Pinar (1991) propose that there is a "significance of place" which must be used as a framework for curriculum theorizing. Where one is from shapes who one is as an individual and as a member of cultural and social groups, and influences how one views and interacts with people who are different from oneself, the "other." Using this theory as a framework, this article suggests that for peaceful coexistence of cultures to be a reality, multicultural education should approach multiculturalism in a way that makes coexistence possible because of the acceptance of difference without the imposition of one idea or set of ideas. Therefore, there cannot be a "one-size-fits-all" model of multicultural education. Since even researchers and theorists are not in agreement on what multiculturalism and multicultural education are, it is evident that the context in which multicultural education is taught must be considered for the concepts to be relevant and therefore, comprehensible, to the learners. This article compares and contrasts the contexts of the United States and Poland, focusing on the significance of multicultural education in both places and how it is approached in each place.

Keywords

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In *Curriculum as Social Psychoanalysis: The Significance of Place*, Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) describe the nature of place and its importance in one's understanding of who one is. "Place particularizes and conveys

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embedded social forces" (p. 4) providing a context for the existence of a culture and a society, and the individuals within them, influencing their worldview and their self concept. An epistemology of place suggests that context can shape how people interact with others in their sphere and with those outside it. Being able to interact effectively with others outside one's sphere is a major issue in this time of ever-increasing globalization which has increased the need for global partnering and collaboration (Navarrete 2002). With people coming together from many disparate places, an examination of multiculturalism and diversity is necessary because interactions with others outside one's sphere inevitably leads to miscommunication and misunderstandings. Rather than disrupting potential relationships, the interested parties need to recognize that the development and sustainability of international partnerships and collaborations are impacted by a variety of characteristics which affect cross-cultural adaptation, such as cultural distance, reasons for the entry into the new environment, or reasons for the collaboration (Delle Fave and Bassi, 2009). Whether looking at the experience of immigration or the interactions between people who live in different countries, the study of multiculturalism and diversity covers a broad spectrum of issues which can bring people together as well as push them apart. How these issues play out is strongly influenced by place, the context of where the interactions take place as well as where participants come from.

Because context plays such a major role in multiculturalism, questions about multicultural education policy must be posed and explored to examine the issues under consideration from a variety of perspectives. What does an educational policy that ensures peaceful coexistence of various cultures in one country or on one continent look like? How do we educate so that interactions among various groups are respectful of each other? How can past policies which aim at assimilation of immigrants be reconfigured so that a more pluralistic view of sharing a place can be realized? How do we address ethical dilemmas which may surface in interactions with those from other cultures? In order to answer these and similar questions, there must first be the recognition that there will not be a simple answer, there may be multiple answers, and there may not be a complete answer to any of these questions. Different solutions may suit different situations. Some answers may fit in one instance and not in another in the same context. In order to create a framework for examining these questions this article compares what multiculturalism looks like in two places, the United States and Poland. First, it identifies what multiculturalism and multicultural education are. Next, it compares

and contrasts the demographics and history of each country. Then, the article explores multicultural education, using examples from the author's experiences teaching university courses that focus on multicultural issues and how the relevance of the different topics in various contexts influenced the way in which they were approached with different groups of students. These contrasting experiences provide insight into how multicultural education cannot be a "one-size-fits-all" model.

Researchers, theorists, and educators alike are not in agreement on what multiculturalism and multicultural education mean. Sleeter and Grant (2009) point out that one reason for this lack of agreement is because people "do not always agree on what forms of diversity it addresses" (p. vii). Some define multiculturalism narrowly, focusing only on elements such as race, ethnicity, religion. A monocultural society such as China tends to view cultural dimensions from such a narrow perspective. Others take a broader view, including gender, sexual orientation, social class, any aspect of society or culture that shapes a person's worldview or their identity. Proponents of multicultural education in the United States, for instance, range from those who have the narrow view to a much broader view. Nieto (2011) asserts that one must keep in mind that multicultural education exists in a broad context, so multicultural education must "confront issues of power and privilege in society...challenging racism and other biases as well as the structures, policies, and practices of schools" (p. 4). Milner et al. (2003) advocate infusing diversity and multicultural education throughout a curriculum so that participants do not view these separate issues, but as an interwoven whole. Bennett (2011) advocates a transformative multicultural educational approach "based upon democratic values and beliefs and that affirms cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies in an interdependent world" (p. 14) in order to develop students to their highest potential, intellectually, socially, and personally. This type of multicultural education could only be possible in a context in which there are democratic values and beliefs. Even in a multicultural country such as the United States, which is based on democratic values and beliefs, a narrow perspective of multiculturalism tends to be the norm.

The experience of multiculturalism in the United States provides a good starting point for looking at political and social issues related to globalization. Changing demographics through waves of immigration from all areas of the world throughout its history has created difficulties for immigrants and challenges for American citizens in the workplace, in education, in communities, in most areas of life all across the United States. Urban areas with heavy industrialization

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have been the most affected historically, but suburban and rural areas also have come in for their share of challenges created by immigration patterns. Three groups make up the general demographics of the United States, and their immigration experience and their experiences living in America have been quite different. The dominant society and culture of the United States reflects the Anglo-Saxon Protestant cultural identity of the nation's founders, most of whom immigrated to this country voluntarily. White Americans of various ethnicities and cultural backgrounds make up about 72.4% (United States Census Bureau, 2011) of the population, while the two largest minority groups – Black and Hispanic – make up 12.6% and 16.3% respectively. The ancestors of most African-Americans in the United States were brought forcibly to this country as slaves by these founders, creating a population of what Ogbu (1992) refers to involuntary immigrants while many Hispanic immigrants have come as voluntary immigrants. The US Census Bureau (2012) estimates that by 2060, the percentage of White inhabitants will decrease to around 43%, while the largest minority groups, Black and Hispanic will increase to 15% and 31% respectively.

Poland on the other hand has had a fairly homogeneous population through much of its history, but especially in the years since the end of World War II. The largest population group in Poland has been and continues to be Polish Catholics. Populations of other races and ethnicities have always been small in Poland, except for the Jewish population in pre-Holocaust Poland. Prior to World War II, about 20% of the Polish population was Jewish. At various times in Polish history, Jews were not integrated and assimilated into Polish society, and at other times, they were more integrated and assimilated depending on the political and social climate of the times. After World War II, Poland became part of the Soviet-bloc which effectively cut it off from large parts of the world. After the end of Soviet domination, Poland's borders once again opened and some immigration to the country has taken place. However, even today, the population of non-Polish Catholics is quite small. The largest non-European ethnic group in Poland is Vietnamese, most of whom live in Warsaw and other urban areas.

Educational policies in both countries are partially shaped by demographics since a country's educational policies are part of the larger sociopolitical context of the country. Education and curriculum reflect the values and norms of society and shape and influence those living in the society, "individual development and the quality of the social context are interdependent" (Eisner and Vallance, 1974, p.11). In a society whose economy is heavily industrialized and in which conformance

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is important, an essentialist curriculum with teacher-centered education is dominant. In a service-directed economy in a more democratic society there is less need for training workers for vocations and more need to teach citizens how to live in a democratic society. In the 21st century, it is "necessary for the individual to carry on a successful life individually, socially, and globally" (Pachocinski, 1997, p. 8) and education can and should reflect this shift. Education in the United States and in Poland provides examples of this interdependence between education and society, and how the shift to globalism has created a need for relevant multicultural education in both countries.

From its earliest years, people from all over the world have made their home in the United States bringing with them their languages, religions, customs, and traditions. The Industrial Revolution in the mid 1800s brought immigrants to this country in large numbers. Protecting the American way of life, its language (English), and its culture based on Anglo-Saxon Protestant values, became the focus of education. Education and literacy "as a way of transmitting and maintaining Anglo-American culture and language" (Stein 1988, x) were important in socializing immigrants into the Anglo-American way of life. Literacy laws became part of the background against who was eligible to be an American citizen and to vote were based. Acculturation and assimilation were the desired results. According to Stein (1988), this ideology "was based on the belief that if immigrants and their families would replace their culture with the American culture, they would succeed in American society" (p. 12). Toward the end of the 20th century there was a shift toward a more pluralistic view of society, a society in which people can retain their cultural heritage and language and still become part of the American fabric of life. There was also recognition of a need for a development of multicultural awareness in the citizenry as a whole. This perception of the United States as a multicultural society often overrides any perception of globalization and interactions with people outside of the country. Therefore, multicultural education in the United States tends to focus more on issues within its borders.

In Poland the situation has been different. As early as the mid-1500s, Poland was home to a diverse group of people with many languages, ethnic groups, and religions represented in the country. However, as in the United States, there was one language, in this case Polish, which was the language of government, business, science and culture. According to Davies (1984), as these various groups interacted together they inspired one another, promoted tolerance, and developed "a strong tradition of education" (p. 317). Through the partitions

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and the Soviet era, the diversity of Polish society was splintered but the adherence to monolingualism and to the Catholic Church provided the glue which held Polish culture together. In 21st century Poland, there is still little cultural diversity, but with entry into the European Union and increased globalization, Polish business is conducted with companies all around the world, which brings Poles, especially in urban areas, into contact with a variety of people of different nationalities and cultures. While Polish education has changed in the past 20 years from an essentialist curriculum training workers to a more progressive curriculum suited for a service-based economy, the need for multicultural education is not seen as relevant at the primary and secondary levels. When information about other cultures is presented, it often focuses on "otherness", especially as regards to "exotic" cultures such as those in Africa or Asia; Jews in Poland; and how holidays are celebrated in other cultures. Courses such as multicultural education and intercultural communication are reserved for those in specialized fields, such as international business or translation studies, in which there will be direct contact with people from other countries and cultures.

By looking at these two places, their history and their presence in today's world, it is evident that the context in which multicultural education is taught must be considered for the concepts to be relevant and therefore, comprehensible, to the learners. For example, teaching about race using Ogbu's (1992) notions of blacks as involuntary immigrants is relevant in the context of the United States where American identity and society is shaped and influenced by race and race relations. In countries where race is not a primary cultural marker, this perspective of race is less relevant to the lived experiences of the inhabitants. A curriculum which looks at the role of race in colonialism may be more comprehensible and relevant to this group, since race, and its role in colonialization, planted the seeds for some of the challenges of globalization.

However, there are certain basic concepts, such as stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and culture as a social construct that can be used as a framework for teaching about multiculturalism anywhere in the world. For example, cultural bias is often a matter of misconception based on stereotyping. Generalizing from reading sparse facts or viewing popular movies can create understandings of cultures that are inaccurate and often result in negative judgments about an entire culture (Fung and Filippo, 2002). Certainly, cultural knowledge does not equate to cross-cultural understanding or cultural sensitivity. Multicultural education which encourages the participants to examine their own culture and their place in it and that influences

intercultural interactions is as important as learning about other cultures. This type of education requires incorporating information, reflection, and practice.

Knowledge and gaining knowledge can take many forms, as can what to do with that knowledge once it is acquired. In literature about diversity, diversity training, and multicultural education various schemata are used to explain how people learn about respect, tolerance, and appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism. A survey of the literature (Bruch et al., 2004; Banks, 2008; Bennett, 2011; Gollnick & Chinn 2008; Nieto, 2011; Sleeter & Grant, 2009; Tiedt & Tiedt, 2009) demonstrates the complexity and the contradictory nature of diversity and multiculturalism and presents an array of approaches to educating about it.

Regardless of the approach, multicultural education usually relies on one of a variety of models which identifies stages that people go through when in unfamiliar cultural situations as a starting point. Most of these models identify a continuum which includes stages such as cultural knowledge, knowing facts about a culture; cultural awareness or cultural acceptance, being aware that other cultures exist and acknowledging differences; and cultural sensitivity, being cognizant of how one may have to alter one's attitudes and/or behavior in order to interact effectively with someone from another culture (Zimmerman & Peled, 2009, p. 954).

These stages reflect the complexity of these interactions because they each involve learning at the affective as well as the cognitive level; our feelings and thoughts influence each other.

Authentic cross-cultural activities can help participants explore cross-cultural aspects of another culture at more than a superficial level by accessing the affective as well as the cognitive level. However, multicultural activities often go no further than the cultural knowledge or awareness stage. This type of "celebratory" approach tends to highlight "the positive accomplishments and aspects of many different cultures and social groups" (Bruch et al. 2004, p. 13), and is often identified as "awareness," "respect for others different from ourselves," "acceptance", and "tolerance." Participants gain superficial knowledge about groups rather than developing authentic cultural sensitivity. In order to do that, participants must engage in reflection, interaction, and collaboration (Bruch et al. 2004; Zimmerman, 2006).

For instance, one activity that is effective in helping learners start to move away from just awareness of difference is to have them discuss several scenarios from their perspective and why they reacted as they did to the situations. Then they are given instructions to explain

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how someone from another culture which has different norms and expectation would react (Peace Corps, n.d.). For example, the scenario may be "seeing a young couple kissing on a park bench." In most European cultures, this is not an uncommon scene, so the initial responses from students in the United States and in Poland, for instance, are "this is normal" or "there is nothing unusual about this." However, when asked to look at this scenario from the perspective of a culture in which men and women do not touch in public, they begin to see that what they may view as an everyday occurrence can become something totally different when seen through another set of cultural lenses. On the other hand, an example like this used with a group of women in Saudi Arabia may be seen as completely inappropriate. This issue has been highlighted recently because there have been complaints that English language teaching materials have too many representations of Western culture which are counter to Saudi mores. Therefore, selection of materials and activities must be taken into account so that they are not counterproductive, or even dismissed as irrelevant and inappropriate.

The ideal learning environment for multicultural education would be for participants to be able to take part in real-life situations with others from different countries and cultures. However, because this is not always possible, case study activities in which participants must analyze a situation from the perspective of various stakeholders then solve a problem in a way that reflects the context can offer one way of going beyond the superficial and approaching authenticity. Reflecting on how they approached the issues based on the perspective of the various characters in the case study scenario can help participants compare and contrast different approaches to problems embedded in a variety of cultural contexts.

According to Brown (2004), reflection is a key component of multicultural education. In her research, Brown (2004) concluded that students developed a better comprehension of the issues when she gave her students opportunities for self-examination in the early weeks of the class and then provided them with opportunities "to actively participate in cross-cultural field experiences and to actively engage in cross cultural research" (Brown 2004, p. 336) throughout the class. Identifying elements in one's own culture and reflecting on how they shape and influence one's worldview are necessary for creating a foundation for effective cross-cultural activities.

In educational foundations courses that the author teaches in the United States, for instance, students read articles about social class/socioeconomic status and its social impact on education to create

a theoretical basis for their field experience, an observation in an urban school with a high percentage of students who live at or below the poverty level. Then they analyze the school to which they have been assigned, which usually has an equal percentage of white, black, and Hispanic students. Some of the university students have attended similar schools, but most are white students who came from suburban (generally, middle class) areas with white students making up the racial majority in their schools. By comparing their own school experiences with what they have read in the articles and with what they observe in the school setting, they reflect on what the social and cultural implications of the intersection of social class, social economic status, race, and ethnicity have on education and how this knowledge will impact them as teachers. They have to suggest how they would adapt their teaching to ensure that children who may have little or no support at home, few resources, and decreased motivation for learning can overcome social barriers to receive the same education as their peers in more affluent areas.

This type of constructing of knowledge based on theory and practice is part of constructivist learning theory (Fosnot, 1989; Rorty, 1991; Duffy & Cunningham, 2001) which argues that learning occurs when an activity is engaged in within a particular context. Vygotsky (1962, 1978) and Bakhtin (Duffy & Cunningham, 2001) further suggest that since the creation of understanding is an interactive process, understanding must come from different perspectives in a given sociocultural context. Learning occurs "when the learner's expectations are not met, and he or she must resolve the discrepancy between what was expected and what was actually encountered " (Duffy & Cunningham, 2001, para. 33). As learners examine different perspectives, often through interaction with others, they are able to work out their own solution. Through such interactions as the field experience described earlier, participants can begin to examine issues which they may not have realized existed and work out how they as teachers could teach effectively in this context.

Multicultural education in the United States tends to focus more on the peaceful coexistence of its diverse groups of people within its borders, and less on the global experience. In a fairly monocultural country like Poland the case tends to be the opposite. While there is a need for education that promotes the peaceful coexistence of people within its borders, there may be more of a need for self-awareness about the Polish culture and how it impacts global interconnections.

Because the issues of multiculturalism in Poland relate more to globalization, field experience-type activities may not be possible,

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so different approaches must be used. Guest speakers from multinational companies can provide insight into challenges they face working with a wide range of people. Case studies which focus on situations in international collaborations and interactions, such as issues with business ethics or etiquette, provide opportunities to examine, analyze and reflect on how to interact effectively with people from other countries and cultures. Online activities guided by multicultural educators with people from other countries can provide opportunities to solve problems together and to observe and discuss different problem solving methods.

While there are some basic fundamental concepts that could be taught in any situation, the details of multicultural education must reflect the cultural context of the country where the training is taking place. However, this is not to say that multicultural education should avoid controversial issues. Trainers should encourage participants to step outside of their comfort zone, but what shape that takes and to what degree depends on the context. However, attempts to coerce a particular point of view or to try to create a unified moral code or worldview are problematic. The peaceful coexistence of various cultures is desirable, but we have to stay aware of whose moral code and whose worldview the model reflects and how appropriate it is for the constituents. Multicultural education policies must acknowledge the complexity of these issues.

If one considers the significance of place (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991) as a framework for curriculum theorizing, there cannot be a "one-size-fits-all" model of multicultural education. Who the participants are and where they come from must be acknowledged as a key part of the approach used. For peaceful coexistence of cultures to be a reality, multicultural education should approach multiculturalism in a way that makes space in which coexistence is possible through the acceptance of difference without the imposition of one idea or set of ideas.

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Lynn W. Zimmerman – wykładowca w the School of Education na Purdue University Calumet w Hammond (Indiana, Stany Zjednoczone), gdzie prowadzi kursy z zakresu podstaw edukacji. Uczy również komunikacji międzykulturowej w Wyższej Szkole Euopejskiej w Krakowie. Jako stypendystka Fundacji im. J. M. Fullbrighta, wiosną 2009 roku prowadziła zajęcia z dydaktyki języka angielskiego na Uniwersytecie Wrocławskim. W ramach wolontariatu z ramienia Korpusu Pokoju pracowała z licealistami z Wrześni, ucząc angielskiego (TEFL). Jej zainteresowania badawcze koncentrują się wokół komunikacji międzykulturowej, uczenia języków i nauczania o Holokauście.

Streszczenie

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Edukacja wielokulturowa: Kluczowa rola kontekstu

Joe L. Kincheloe oraz William Pinar są zdania, że u podstaw wszelkich rozważań na temat tworzenia programów nauczania powinna leżeć kwestia „znaczenia miejsca". Pochodzenie danej osoby nie tylko determinuje to, kim jest jako jednostka i członek różnych grup społecznych i kulturowych, lecz również wpływa na to, jak postrzegamy osoby odmienne od nas i jak komunikujemy się z nimi w ramach społeczeństwa. Przyjmując tę teorię jako punkt wyjścia, w niniejszym artykule pokazuję, że pokojowe współistnienie odmiennych kultur jest możliwe tylko wówczas, gdy w danym kraju praktykowana jest edukacja wielokulturowa, która w swej wizji wielokulturowości hołduje zasadzie akceptacji różnic i odrzuca możliwość odgórnego narzucania danej idei lub zestawów idei. Nie można zatem mówić o uniwersalnym modelu edukacji wielokulturowej. Skoro nawet teoretycy i badacze nie zgadzają się w kwestii tego, czym jest wielokulturowość i edukacja wielokulturowa, oczywistym jest, że zawsze konieczne jest rozważenie kontekstu, w którym taka edukacja jest prowadzona (kontekst ten bardzo dobrze muszą też znać sami nauczyciele). Niniejszy artykuł stanowi porównanie kontekstu amerykańskiego i polskiego. Nacisk położony został na znaczenie edukacji wielokulturowej i sposoby jej postrzegania w obydwu krajach.

Słowa kluczowe

Edukacja wielokulturowa, wielokulturowość, komunikacja międzykulturowa,