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Freedom, Equity and Multicultural Education

Abstract: Multicultural education is a broad area as complex as multiculturalism itself is. Multicultural education can be defined in various ways: as a concept, as an ideal, as reform movement or as an effort to restructure school system. There are many approaches to multicultural education as well. However determined, the phenomenon of multicultural education has yet many issues and contradictions of theoretical and practical nature to resolve. Some of the concerns regard the very values upon the concept is founded, equity and freedom for example. There are several contradictions among and within these values that manifest their potential when faced with the reality of education practice. The paper does not propose to offer answers to profound questions which may be posed to the multicultural education concept; rather, it aims to raise some issues which will be encountered in education, in view of the growing needs for multicultural education principles in the increasingly globalised world.

Key words: multicultural education, freedom and equity in education.

The world and our understanding of the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century have become highly complex. The current changes are characterised by uncertainty, contradictions and multifaceted nature of reality. The globalised world in which everything interacts with everything else and in which the likely visibility of any material phenomenon potentially brings any individual in contact with any situation, has created numerous benefits, as well as contradictions within the contemporary civilisation. However, in addition to the new contradictions, we are becoming increasingly aware of the old ones, which draw more attention of the professional circles. Some of the contradictions to be addressed in this paper include that between the concepts of freedom and equity, as

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well as the contradictions within each of these values. These contradictions seem to be the most prominent precisely when manifested in the field of education.

Multicultural education, both as a movement and as a concept, constitutes, *inter alia*, an attempt at resolving and managing the internal conflicts of modern society. Before considering some aspects of equity, freedom and education, there will be briefly presented a concept of multicultural education.

The variety of definitions of multicultural education reflects the perspective of different academic disciplines, professional organisations, agencies and ministries of education etc. Banks (Banks, 2001) distinguishes three dimensions of multicultural education definition: multicultural education as an idea, educational reform movement and a changing educational system structure process.

Concept of multicultural education

As a concept, multicultural education is a set of beliefs and explanations that recognizes and values the importance of ethnic and cultural diversity in shaping lifestyles, social experiences, personal identities, and educational opportunities of individuals, groups, and nations. Multicultural education prescribes what actions should be performed in order to ensure equitable accessibility and treatment for diverse groups in schools and in society. Some authors equate multicultural education with a “renewed and refined version of liberal education, education for freedom and celebration of the inherent plurality of the world” (Banks, 2001: 28). There has been a high level of consensus on goals of multicultural education. A major goal would be a reform of school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse ethnical, racial and social-class groups are able to reap the benefits of such educational equality. Another important goal would be equality of chances for male and female students to experience educational success and mobility.

When comprehending on goals of multicultural education it is interesting to describe work of American anthropologist Margaret Gibson (Gibson, 1984) who identified five approaches to multicultural education in United States of America which could be generalised and used as a ground for understanding approaches to multicultural education in the global context. Although all five approaches do overlap in some aspects, the author believes that at least first four approaches can be distinguished primarily based upon the criteria of objectives. In addition, she specified basic assumptions for the first four approaches regarding underlying values, change strategies, intended outcomes, and target populations. The fifth approach is conceptualised on the basis of educational and cultural

perspective, and does not, which is especially significant for the field of adult education, equate education with schooling or view multicultural education as the concept reserved for formal curriculum.

(1) *Education of the Culturally Different or Benevolent Multiculturalism.* The purpose of multicultural education here is to *equalize educational opportunities* for culturally different students. The issue that can be highlighted here is academic failure of students from certain minority ethnic groups whose school performance continues to stay behind national norms. Key cause for mentioned phenomena can be found in the fact that culturally different face unique learning handicaps in schools dominated by mainstream values. In order to solve the issues proponents of this approach propose division of school programs in order to increase home/school cultural compatibility. In return these programs are to increase student formal education success. The target populations are the students from certain minority ethnic groups who stay furthest behind norms on school performance. These students are labelled culturally different because they share only peripherally in the mainstream culture. And the main strategy would be effort to reconstruct school program so it can be able to diminish discrepancy between school and home culture.

In addition, I would like here to point out negative aspect of separate schools for ethnic minorities. Following the differentiation of mainstream and ethnic culture, it could be concluded that mentioned schools tend to petrify students in the state of their origin culture and deprive them of internalising categorical notions, as well as of sensibility for mainstream culture, as the means to communicate in multidimensional globalised world. Comprehended in the language of Marcuse this state would only be good in creating one-dimensional man. Besides this approach has many positive elements, it does not lack of many weaknesses which will not be explained in this work due to form of the article.

(2) *Education about Cultural Differences or Cultural Understanding* has a purpose to teach students to value cultural differences, to understand the meaning of the culture concept, and to accept others' right to be different. Further, its focus is education about cultural differences rather than education for the so-called culturally different. At the beginning, the demands for education about cultural differences came from those groups that were most oppressed by and least assimilated into the mainstream culture of USA. Focus of this approach is the demand for schools to be more orientated toward cultural enrichment of students and for programs to foster acceptance of cultural differences. There can be noted that "weakness of this approach is that it presumes to change the existing social order from within the established educational system" (Gibson, 1984: 101).

Other weakness is that connected to implicit structure of the programs. Pettigrew notes that “multiculturalism focuses its concepts on behavioural differences exclusively rather than on both similarities between and among all segments of the society. To continue to focus on differences is perhaps to continue subtly to support the inferiority-superiority hypotheses while at the same time postulating an acceptance on a level of parity of differential behaviour manifestations from all cultures“ (Pettigrew, 1974: 82).

(3) *Education for Cultural Pluralism*. The purpose of multicultural education is to preserve and to extend cultural pluralism in society. In opinion of the author, multicultural education for cultural pluralism is the hardest approach to depict, even as an abstract, ideal-type construct. One group of authors see cultural pluralism as ideal to which multicultural education should strive for, while others use it as a synonym for cultural diversity.

In anthropology, the concept regards to social stratification theory in order to reflect on relationships among different ethnic groups in former colonial countries as well as to differ plural societies from the homogeneous or heterogeneous societies. Target group related to this approach are ethnic minorities that rejected majority enforced acculturation and assimilation such was American concept of “melting pot“ which can be also considered as fusion concept within the boundaries of the approach. Approach proponents argue that both, assimilation as well as cultural fusion are desirable or acceptable societal goals. Furthermore, it is crucial that cultural diversity maintains, as it is critical for the survival of particular groups. Instead of fusing different cultures educational institutions should find the way not only to preserve pluralism of cultures but to extend it as well. Outcome would be empowerment of minority groups. In this view, acculturation is seen as a broad process defined as change in formerly autonomous cultures that come into contact. More specific process is the process of assimilation which represents organisational and structural absorption of formerly autonomous institutions and/or members of one society by another. Fusion occurs when combination of distinctive culture transforms its characteristics into new complexes. On the other hand, pluralism can be explained as the process that results in a state in which two or more cultures maintain some degree of autonomy usually developing parallel institutions (stabilized pluralism).

“Newman expresses the meaning of these concepts in simple formulas: (1) assimilation: $A + B + C = A$, where A, B, and C represent different social groups and A represents the dominant group; (2) fusion: $A + B + C = D$, where A, B, and C represent different social groups and D represents a distinct new group; (3) pluralism: $A + B + C = A + B + C$, where A, B, and C represent different social groups that over time maintain their unique identities“ (by Gibson, 1974: 105)

If pluralism can be understood (as mentioned above) as a concept in which different cultures exist on an unparallel level but maintain some degree of autonomy then I would propose a new formula: $A + B + C = A \times N + B \times N + C \times N$, where N represents *mutual* and *common* elements of the cultures developed and emerged as the product of acculturation process.

(4) *Bicultural Education*. The purpose of bicultural education is to produce learners who have competencies to operate successfully in two different cultures. It is usually used in the contexts of bilingual education programs. Many, if not all, of these programs contain elements of previously mentioned approaches. They focus on developing and maintaining pride in native culture, reduce prejudice and discrimination, creating a fuller and deeper understanding of cultural heritage, increase motivation and academic success, remove obstacles toward educational opportunities etc. In context of this approach aim is also developing language competence.

Table 1: Approaches to multicultural education in United States

Approach	Proponents	Precondition	Underlying Value	Target Population	Intended Outcomes
Benevolent Multiculturalism	Mainstream educators	Rejection of cultural and genetic deficit models	Compatibility of home/school cultures	Culturally different students	Equity in educational benefits
Cultural understanding	1. Subordinate minorities 2. Immigrant minorities 3. Mainstream educators	Immigrant minorities' demands for ethnic -studies (to counter balance subordinate minorities' demands)	Cultural understanding and cultural relativity	All students	Respect and acceptance of others' right to be different
Cultural pluralism	Subordinate minorities	Rejection of majority enforced cultural assimilation	Preservation and extension of ethnic groups	Subordinate minority group students	Increased power for minority groups
Bicultural Education	Non-English mother tongue minorities	Rejection of majority enforced cultural assimilation	Reciprocal learning	All students	Bicultural competencies

Source: (Gibson, 1974, pp. 110)

(5) *Multicultural Education as the Normal Human Experience*. The fifth concept differs in several basic elements compared to the other four. Gibson defines multi cultural education as *competencies development* in multiple standards

for existing in multicultural society. Using the comprehensions of education of Thomas and Wahrhaftig, Spindler and Goodenough, she defines multicultural education “as the process whereby a person develops competencies in multiple systems of standards for perceiving, evaluating, believing, and doing. Such a definition has important implication for our analysis of the meaning of multicultural education and allows us to overcome a number of the conceptual weaknesses of the four approaches presented previously“ (Gibson, 1974: 112).

Several attitudes are to be depicted regarding this. First, view of education as cultural transmission relieves educators from assuming primary responsibility for students’ acquisition of cultural competencies and suggests inclusion of informal, non-formal, that is, all out-of-school learning. Second, there can be no more such restrictions that equate culture and ethnic group. While an ethnic group indeed might share a particular set of standards, its members also can be sorted into other sets that participate in common activities, related, for example, to work or religion or recreation. Person can cut across its ethnic boundaries when internalising and manifesting standards of other specific culture in a diverse society or when consuming/practicing global culture,

Third, since the development of competence in a new culture usually requires intensive interaction with people who *already are competent*, one can see even more clearly that efforts to support ethnically separate schools are antithetical to the purposes of multicultural education. In this thoughts Gibson implicitly highlights element that is important for adult education. Already competent can mostly be applied on adult target groups. Fourth, concerns of proponents of multicultural education, that mainstream schools will cause students to reject their original culture identities result from a confusion of social identification with cultural competence. Which culture an individual will draw upon in some occasions will be determined by situation factors primarily. Finally, multicultural competences approach neglects the need for bicultural education and overcomes dichotomies between native and mainstream culture.

It can be noted that proposed concept and approach offered by Gibson is free from “multicultural values“ burden. It simply offers sets of competencies and just enables students to communicate and exists in diverse societies. Practicing of those competencies depends of student own choices; it does not offer to maintain original culture in contrast to mainstream culture, to fuse or to assimilate. On the other hand the concept misses its structure that is, clear guidelines of competencies to be developed.

James A. Banks (Banks, 2001) proposed that dimensions of multicultural education could be (a) content integration, (b) the knowledge construction process, (c) prejudice reduction, (d) an equity pedagogy, (e) an empowering school

culture and social structure. According to the author, content integration deals with the extent to which teachers use examples, data, and information from variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalisations, and theories in their subject area or discipline. In many cases, multicultural education is viewed in this manner – only and primarily as content integration. This widespread belief could be the factor that causes science and mathematics teachers to think of multicultural education as something that should and could be the focus of social science and art and humanities teachers and specialists.

Among the aims of the knowledge construction process is to help students to realise how knowledge is constructed and influenced by various social characteristics (race, nation, religion etc.) Prejudice reduction as an educational goal aims to develop and define strategies that can be used to help students develop more democratic attitudes and values. By the term equity pedagogy, Banks means the methodology and various techniques that could be used in the education process in order to facilitate school achievement of students from different cultural backgrounds. Restructuring organisation and culture of the school environment into “culture variety friendly” environment should be the organisational context within which a process of learning is conducted.

Equity in education

Social science and humanities theorists share a widespread view that modern politics operate on an *egalitarian plane* (Will Kymlicka), implying the almost universally accepted principle that all members of a political community should be treated as equal and that the state is obliged to provide for and respect all members equally, or – more precisely – that all individuals in a given community should receive *equal treatment*. There is, however, disagreement with respect to interpretation of equity. Nozick, for example, understands it as equal respect for individuals’ property rights.

In interpretation of equity, we can distinguish between two principal lines of thought. One emphasises that all citizens must be treated with care and respect and that such care and respect are dependent solely on their citizenship status (rather than on race, sex, religion, social/economic status etc.). Unequal social relations, relations of superiority and subordination inevitably lead to oppression, marginalisation and exclusion, which in turn lead to inequity in the distribution of resources. Another line of thought adds the necessity for redistribution of resources to the understanding of equity outlined above. Multicultural education relies on the first interpretation of equity in its two forms: equity before the law

and equity in terms of respect for civil rights. The distinction between the two types of equity is arbitrary and involves a potential contradiction, which will not be discussed in detail in this paper. I will just mention that advocates of the first view of equity in distribution of resources underline that inequity in terms of resources that individuals have at their disposal does not affect their legal status; for example, under the assumption that the said proposition is true, the problem of inequity in terms of the *quality* of legal protection conditioned by the social/economic status of the concerned individual remains open.

The issues of equity and freedom are key questions reflected in the domain of multicultural education. The issue of equity is an issue of educational policy defining *equity of educational opportunities* and *accessibility to education*. Individuals' social characteristics addressed by the multicultural education concept, such as sex, race, ethnicity and social/economic status, are closely linked to equity of educational opportunities, if not formally then certainly in terms of content.

Some authors (Adam, 2006) state that the less affluent 50% of the population of the United Kingdom give a mere 7% of university students. This example clearly illustrates that equity of opportunities is highly dependent on individuals' *initial roles*. In that sense, it is my opinion that education may be seen as an *intermediate point* between an individual's initial social/economic status, i.e. the social/economic status of his/her primary family, and the social/economic status that the individual achieves in adulthood, linked with the occupational status and income. Namely, education could become the *intervention point* at which it is possible to act through educational policy mechanisms in order to alter the initial role of the less affluent strata.

Freedom in education

Those authors who consider the category of *values* as the most significant among the philosophical categories of significance for education are right. Education is closely linked to the notion of values, primarily owing to axiological dimension of educational goals. Numerous issues have been raised by various streams of educational philosophy. The liberal education philosophy, relevant to multicultural education, has thus been related to the idea of the free man – citizen. Jarvis (Savićević, 2002) underlines that liberal education philosophy seeks additional clarification concerning the extent to which people are free. Advocates of liberal education, according to Hirst (Savićević, 2002), stress that such education is an essential element of “good life”, whilst it may be observed that such a characteristic cannot be attributed to all. Similarly to the dual interpretation of the notion of

equity outlined above, it is worth noting the multifaceted nature of the concept of freedom in aspects of import for education.

According to Gerald MacCullam, all statements about freedom can be expressed in the following way: *X* is (is not) free from *Y* to do, become (not do, not become) *Z*. MacCullam presents freedom as a triadic relation: *X* – agent, *Y* – constraint, interference or barrier, *Z* – aim or purpose. Similarly to the dual interpretation of equity, a distinction between two forms of freedom, formal and actual, can be made. Formal freedom would thus constitute the power and capability to act in a certain way and, on the opposite side, simple absence of interference. Liberal political streams (especially those inclined towards the right) thus hold the view that freedom is promoted by minimum intervention on the part of the state and the economy operating according to free market principles. However, the fact that nobody is preventing *X* from doing a certain thing does not necessarily mean that *X* is actually able to do it. It is the left-wing political forces that believe that freedom is realised not only by refraining from interference with people's actions, but also by enabling them to do what they otherwise could not.

In the former case, the role of the state is reduced to Nozick's *night watchman*, while in the latter, state interventionism is openly invited. It is precisely in such views that the internal controversy of values such as freedom becomes apparent. In that sense, free market may be understood as contradictory or as *y* – the obstacle to actual freedom in terms of *equity of educational opportunities*. In addition, this example illustrates that positive societal values compatible at first sight, such as equity and freedom, can easily conflict with each other. There is a certain "logical tension" or contradiction between them, waiting to emerge. Moreover, in different societies or different periods, we can see that, in spite of political advocacy of both values on the part of the elite, in reality one of them is dominant. While liberal societies give precedence to freedom, in particular *freedom from* at the expense of equity (but not equality), communist societies sacrifice freedom on the altar of equity. In real-life politics of most European countries we see that compromises between these two views or extremes are made every day.

Education in general benefits from another typology of freedom: freedom as autonomy and freedom to act at will. An educated person may be considered freer than an uneducated one in two respects. Firstly, a more educated person is offered more possibilities – possibilities to act (freedom to act at will). Education, however, offers an additional quality. A person taught to think independently, to consider the consequences of his/her own actions and decide on the directions in which he/she will act is more independent and capable of assuming more control of his/her life than a person who possesses no, or a lower degree of, such abilities.

Kant distinguished between the *ideal* or *higher* self and the *empirical* or *lower* self. Autonomy is achieved when the *higher* self is in control of the *lower* self. Accordingly, it may be said that education as systematic, organised, intentional socialisation orientated towards socially recognised values “liberates” the human being, contributing to his/her autonomous freedom. In this context, P. Freire, author of the concept of “liberating” education, deserves a mention. A real threat to freedom as autonomy is the aspiration of totalitarian political systems to assume the role of an individual’s higher self in the interest of the proclaimed higher political aim. As regards the development of personal autonomy, it is worth noting the importance of the liberal education concept and the pragmatic philosophy of education that empowers the student to set his/her own goals and select the educational contents and methods in accordance with his/her own interests, aided by the teacher as an equal partner in the educational process that aims to be a process of creative self-transcendence and self-actualisation.

In the globalisation process accompanied by accelerated migrations from the less developed countries towards more developed ones, immigrants’ integration in the domestic system emerges as a major problem. Poor integration results in numerous situations which could partly be explained by the “cultural conflict theory”. By cause, conflicts may be classified into two main types: conflicts of interest and conflicts of values. The latter are of particular importance for multicultural education theory, as they concern the sphere of personal identity. Layman’s concept of individual freedom limited by the freedom of another individual encounters difficulties when it is to be applied in situations of conflict of values, i.e. in situations when values of a particular culture conflict with those of another culture. The French law prohibiting prominent displays of religious symbols in public schools or disputes concerning the wearing of the Sikh ceremonial knives – *kirpans* in schools in Canada are striking examples of such situations where a mismatch between customs of various cultural traditions and school rules or even national laws hinders the achievement of full “equity in freedom” in the school system.

These examples describe conflict between principles of *toleration* and *recognition* within concept of multicultural education and standard debate over how to best respond to diverse cultural identities within single society. The proponents of first stream call for privatising the differences in order to realise the values of equal liberty and opportunity. In that respect every individual should privatise its own cultural differences and act in public as if those differences do not exist. At its best this principle implies that citizen has a right to practice its cultural difference in privacy, but does not require of it to act in public as the differences are irrelevant for his or hers public standing. The other principle, principle of recognition is

calling for public recognition of cultural differences and consequently divides the public domain into equally valuable but isolated and likely confronted cultural group identities. Individuals should publicly practice and recognise their cultural differences, treating all cultural identities as equally valuable but separate.

It is obvious that first approach is based on the value of equity, while the second one is founded upon the value of freedom. Each mentioned approach excludes to some extent the other one. Described example represents conflict between values of equity and freedom, because the *conflict between principles of toleration and recognition is in essence the conflict between equity and freedom*. Postmodernism, which does not recognise hierarchical relation between values belonging to different cultures, raises new issues in the field of multicultural education, especially since, along with the decline of modernism, the ideal of enlightenment declined as well.

Closing remarks

Global migrations, global economy and multimedia have created highly complex relationships which created a need for rethinking and transformation of present concept of multiculturalism. Present situation implies that within the same society we can identify three levels of cultures important for multiculturalism: different ethnic cultures, national mainstream culture and global culture that stands above previous two. Connection spots between those three, that is, the characteristics of overlapping dimensions between them are the potential for multicultural education to work on.

From comprehensions presented in this work several conclusions could be derived. First, as it can be confirmed that for multicultural education, as for any kind of education, values are the core base out of which education goals are derived, there has to be clearly and precisely established hierarchy of desired values, as it is explained that there are dichotomies inherent for their relations. Second, every single concept of multicultural education and its programmes should define what is precisely meant under every value in the context of the concept/programme, as they can be interpreted differently if defined too general. Determined hierarchy of values must be used as an orientation for deciding which value should be superior over another in situations in which different values are confronted to each other in every day educational practice. This could be used to prevent arbitrary and random decisions of education practitioners, programme creators, education policy decision makers and institutions faced with a need to resolve concrete issue. However, it is quite expected that not all of practice issues

could be resolved in this manner and some of them will need be resolved *ad iudicium* or in new, creative manner. “Disagreements about limits of diversity fuel creative and destructive tensions within the unity. The more the creative tensions overwhelm the destructive ones, the better off a democracy is and the more constructive work democratic educators have to cut out of them” (Gutmann, 2004: 95).

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Sloboda, jednakosti i multikulturalno obrazovanje

Abstract: Multikulturalno obrazovanje je široko područje, složeno koliko i sam multikulturalizam. Može se definisati na različite načine: kao koncept, ideal, kao reformski pokret ili kao okvir za reorganizaciju školskog sistema. Takođe, postoje različiti pristupi multikulturalnom obrazovanju u okviru kojih su otvorena mnoga pitanja i protivurečnosti, teorijske i praktične prirode, koje tek treba da se razreše. Jedna od njih odnosi se na vrednosti na kojima je koncept zasnovan, kao što su jednakost i sloboda. Protivurečnosti, između i u okviru ovih vrednosti, imaju snažan uticaj na obrazovnu praksu. Ovim radom ne plediramo da ponudimo sveobuhvatne odgovore na sva pitanja koja su karakteristična za koncept multikulturalnog obrazovanja. Namera nam je da, u kontekstu procesa globalizacije, naglasimo potrebu zasnivanja ukupnog procesa obrazovanja na principima multikulturalnog obrazovanja.

Ključne reči: multikulturalno obrazovanje, sloboda i jednakost u obrazovanju.

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