

MULTICULTURE AND INTERCULTURE FOR AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

MULTICULTURA E INTERCULTURA PER UNA EDUCAZIONE INCLUSIVA

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Abstract

Multicultural education and intercultural education are concepts that, although they are often used in an alternative way and almost as synonyms, have some intrinsic differences both in terms of geographical areas and socio-political conditions in which they are applied, and precisely in what they are used for it concerns the specific characteristics of the educational intervention. When it comes to multicultural education, this concept can take on many facets, even very different from each other. Similarly, the concept of intercultural education also mainly refers to intercultural relations, but often also in this case there are many aspects that are taken into consideration. In the meaning given by UNESCO, the approaches are different and that of intercultural education is more advanced: multicultural education uses learning from other cultures to produce acceptance, or at least tolerance, of these cultures. Intercultural education aims to go beyond coexistence, to achieve a developed and sustainable way of living together in multicultural society through the creation of understanding, respect and dialogue between different cultural groups.

Educazione multiculturale e educazione interculturale sono concetti che, benché spesso vengano utilizzati in maniera alternativa e alla stregua quasi di sinonimi, presentano alcune differenze intrinseche sia per quanto riguarda le aree geografiche e le condizioni socio-politiche nelle quali trovano applicazione, sia propriamente per quello che riguarda le caratteristiche proprie dell'intervento educativo. Quando si parla di educazione multiculturale, questo concetto può assumere numerose sfaccettature, anche molto diverse tra loro. Analogamente, anche il concetto di educazione interculturale principalmente si riferisce alle relazioni interculturali, ma spesso anche in questo caso sono molti gli aspetti che vengono presi in considerazione. Nell'accezione data dall'UNESCO gli approcci sono diversi e quello dell'educazione interculturale risulta essere più avanzato: l'educazione multiculturale utilizza l'apprendimento di altre culture per produrre accettazione, o almeno tolleranza, di queste culture. L'educazione interculturale mira ad andare oltre la convivenza, per raggiungere un modo di vivere insieme sviluppato e sostenibile nella società multiculturale attraverso la creazione di comprensione, rispetto e dialogo tra i diversi gruppi culturali.

Key-words: Education, Multiculturalism, Interculturalism, Inclusion, Integration.

Parole chiave: Educazione, Multiculturalismo, Interculturalismo, Inclusione, Integrazione.

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Introduction

Although they are often used interchangeably (Nieto, 2006; Hill, 2007), the concepts of multicultural education and intercultural education have some differences, even if in practice the use of one term over the other refers to the geographical context in which is adopted: in Europe the preferred term is intercultural education, while in the United States but also in Australia and Asia the term multicultural education is preferred (Hill, 2007; Leeman & Reid, 2006). However, even in Europe there are differences between the geographical areas of use. The term intercultural education is preferred in Sweden and the Netherlands, while in Britain multicultural education is preferred. Multicultural integration and intercultural education are concepts that are often used as if the terms are universally understood and refer only to one type of education. When it comes to multicultural education, this concept can take on many facets, even very different from each other. Similarly, the concept of intercultural education also mainly refers to intercultural relations, but often also in this case there are many aspects that are taken into consideration. Normally in the European meaning, also prevalent in Italy, the term *interculture* refers to the interaction between different cultures and not to the mere description of the social context in which different cultures occur, a case in which the term *multiculture* is used. In fact, in Europe, the tendency is to understand the concept of *multiculture* as a concept that describes a situation that presents a diversity of cultures while the term *interculture* is used to indicate the interaction and relationship between different cultural groups in a culturally different context (Hill, 2007). Gundara (2000) understands *interculturality* as referring to "interactions, negotiations and processes", considering that multiculturalism increasingly reflects the nature of societies and is used in descriptive terms. This perception has been reiterated by the Council of Europe and the European Commission: these institutions have promoted the term *intercultural education*. UNESCO clearly defines the two terms: the term *multicultural* describes the culturally diverse nature of human society and refers not only to elements of ethnic or national culture, but also includes different language, religion and socio-economic conditions; UNESCO does not include aspects such as gender or race. *Interculture* is described as "a dynamic concept and refers to evolving actions between cultural groups. *Interculturality* presupposes multiculturalism (UNESCO, 2006). In the meaning given by UNESCO, the approaches are different and that of *intercultural education* is more advanced: "Multicultural education uses learning from other cultures to produce acceptance, or at least tolerance, of these cultures. *Intercultural education* aims to go beyond coexistence, to achieve a developed and sustainable way of living together in multicultural society through the creation of understanding, respect and dialogue between different cultural groups." (UNESCO, 2006).

1. Multicultural education

The multicultural approach to education developed in the United States: the so-called *intergroup education* was born after World War II in social contexts in which there were large numbers of African American and Mexican groups; the purpose of *intergroup education* was to reduce racial tensions and increase understanding between groups. Many of the educational programs were based on Allport's (1954) psychological research on interactions between interracial groups. In 1976 Gibson spoke of "education in cultural pluralism", through which students learn about different cultures in order to gain a better understanding of other peoples. The approach to *intercultural / intergroup education* suffered a sharp slowdown in the 1950s and 1960s, when the civil rights movements required courses in ethnic studies to contribute to the advancement of African Americans, a sort of separatist approach in which contents related to other ethnic

groups were taught in separate courses rather than as later in the 1990s more often included in other courses. Multicultural education can be seen as originating from the civil rights movement and the efforts of those who first introduced ethnic content into their courses, but later realized that structural changes were needed to improve the situation of minority students. Subsequently, women and people with disabilities also asked to be included in the curriculum. Now it is the intersections of class, gender and race that are at the center of research and practice, but also the intersections of these with, for example, ethnicity, language and religion. Multicultural education in the United States today is a complex set of approaches. Multicultural education is basic education and is pervasive and for all students. It is also anti-racist education and social justice education. Multicultural education is a process because it mainly involves relationships between people and because it concerns intangible elements such as expectations about student results, learning environments, student learning preferences and other cultural variables "(Nieto, 2004). It is rare, however, that schools in the United States have implemented a multicultural curriculum like the one described by Nieto. More common is the application of what Banks (2004) describes as the contributory approach in which the traditional curriculum remains the same but contents typical of other cultures are added. This approach usually avoids the difficult and complex issues of, for example, racism and poverty. One step up is the additive approach where a book, unit or course with ethnic content is added. However, even here it's just an add-on and the core curriculum remains the same. In the transformative approach, the content is seen from the perspective of multiple ethnic and cultural groups. The goal of the more advanced approach, the social action approach, is "to help students acquire the knowledge, values and skills they need to participate in social change so that racial, ethnic and marginalized and excluded cultural groups can become full participants in society. According to Sleeter and Grant (2003) it is possible to classify multicultural education according to the type of approach. A first approach is that which involves teaching students from different cultures so that they can adapt to the existing school system and reach a level higher than the starting one. This approach prioritizes the promotion of harmony between groups and the use of educational strategies to teach cultural awareness, the reduction of prejudices and stereotypes, identity and pride of the ethnic group. The expected outcomes are respect, tolerance, appreciation and acceptance among different ethnic, racial, cultural and skill groups; respect for oneself; and an understanding of the interdependence of groups and individuals. Another type of approach involves the study of the single group and questions the existing social structure, encouraging students to work for social change concerning a particular oppressed group such as can happen for a particular ethnic group. The multicultural education approach is aimed at all students and promotes equality and cultural pluralism. Cultural pluralism and equal opportunities include race, ethnicity, gender, social class and disability. Differences in religion are hardly ever referred to in the American educational tradition, as the vast majority of people in the United States are Christian and public schools are secular. Another approach is that of multicultural critical education: it is based on the multicultural education approach, but goes a step further by arguing that students are able to learn the skills of social actions by actively working for social change. Critical multicultural education addresses issues such as assessment and disciplinary policies as often in practice these are unfair to students who come from a minority or from a disadvantaged social background. In the US educational context, a very controversial issue in multicultural education is bilingual education. There are many different approaches, but the most common type is bilingual transitional education where the main goal is for students to switch to English as quickly as possible. Teaching English to immigrant students is complicated by the fact that students in the United States speak over 400 different languages. However, over two thirds of immigrant students speak Spanish. Another difficulty is the lack of qualified teachers. There is also political resistance against bilingual education. Although

multicultural education and bilingual education are intimately intertwined, they are often treated as two separate educational programs.

2. Intercultural education

A tradition of approaches to intercultural education is rooted in Europe: these vary according to the country and the social, historical and political background in it. There is a wide spectrum of approaches to intercultural education and even where country policies meet, the didactic and educational reality can differ greatly. Countries differ greatly in their migration histories, as some countries like Belgium, Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, and Portugal are former colonial powers, while states like Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg have had a heavy dependence on workers foreign immigrants. The Scandinavian countries were historically relatively more homogeneous again, but are now emerging as culturally diverse societies. Europe also includes the Balkans, Eastern Europe and the new member states of the European Union, which are affirming new national political and cultural identities, or rediscovering old ones, and their perspective on national minorities and education intercultural is also unique because of their histories and the rapid changes they are going through as nations. (Gaine & Gewirtz 2008). The strong influx of migrants in recent decades has brought the issue of integrating immigrant students to the agenda. In Sweden, for example, the intercultural curriculum has developed slowly since the 1970s and at this time the concept of "internationalization" is a priority in the school curriculum. Since the mid-1980s an intercultural perspective has started to become fundamental in teacher training; at first it was a concept that was part of the broader approach of internationalization, but it has gained in importance due to the increasing number of refugees. as a problem. Other examples of how intercultural education has developed in Europe are Germany and France. In Germany the development and use of the term intercultural education emerged starting in the 1980s and 1990s, despite five decades of mass immigration into the country. Initially it was an assimilationist "foreign pedagogy", then starting from the 1980s a more integrative intercultural education policy slowly emerged. At the same time, Europe has become a focal point in many curricula and many schools have chosen to favor European agendas, or so-called Europe-oriented intercultural education. In France, however, there has been resistance to intercultural ideas and their introduction into education. Citizens according to the French republican model, as Raveaud (2008) observes, have traditionally been defined by the universal abstract qualities of equality, fraternity and freedom, while factors such as regional identity, community culture, religion, ethnicity or gender they are relegated to the private sphere. This separation between the private and the public aims to guarantee equality before the law, without making distinctions on the basis of origin, race or religion. In France, the integration of the Muslim community was seen as a great challenge, and brought with it concerns related to racial and gender discrimination, leading in 2004 to the law banning the use of all religious signs evident in school. Raveaud (2008) identified four parental approaches to today's French educational context: a rigid approach, an approach to cultural heritage (in which curricula are extended and broadened to include multicultural elements), a symbolic approach to diversity (allowing visible manifestations of ethnic, cultural and religious identification) and a multicultural approach in which the diversity of the student body itself is seen as an enrichment. Also the Council of Europe in the field of intercultural education increased use of interdisciplinary methods and group teaching; not so much teaching something different, but teaching differently. Intercultural education stands out as a conflict prevention tool within the Council of Europe and is generally identified as a central

tool against racism and xenophobia. (Leclerq, 2002). The term multicultural education is never mentioned in Council resolutions and recommendations. Intercultural education is divided into two areas:

- 1- inclusion and participation, which centrally includes both pluralism and equality;
- 2- learn to live together. The latter implies a feeling of belonging to a wider community, which is based on mutual respect and a shared belief in dialogue.

The goal of intercultural education "is to incorporate all students into the plural society, giving a new idea of history, geography, language, culture, philosophy, humanity and society". The Council of Europe, as well as the international organizations OECD, UNESCO and the United Nations, have created over the years a series of documents on intercultural education, which have been signed by member governments. These documents reflect ideals and goals, and also constitute concrete commitments and guidelines that governments must implement in practice.

Conclusions

According to the UNESCO interpretation, interculturality creates meanings between cultures, such as those based on ethnicity, language, thoughts, gender and social class, which interact. Interculturality is an action and interaction different from multiculturalism, since the latter refers to an existing condition, to a situation. The concept of multiculturalism is more static than that of interculturality. Taking a school context as a reference, for example, the mere situation of a class made up of pupils of different cultures describes a multicultural education context, but not necessarily an intercultural approach. However, cultural diversity is also not a static term or situation as all identifications and classifications change over time and depending on the situation in the classroom. To summarize, it can be said that intercultural education and multicultural education refer to the curriculum. A curriculum in this sense includes all aspects of education such as education, staffing models, school culture, assessment and disciplinary procedures. A culturally diverse classroom is not the same as a multicultural classroom. Culturally diverse classes may have a monocultural curriculum and the educational program follows the same curriculum as before, i.e. the curriculum that is culturally relevant to the majority of the dominant population. On the other hand, a multicultural curriculum has social justice at its center, addresses issues of gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, language, disability and sexual orientation. Social justice is also at the center of the intercultural orientation of education. A critical intercultural education requires teachers to critically examine their own culture, history and values. Intercultural education is described as crossing borders aiming to create something new that corrects old or existing injustices. It is not possible to draw conclusions about intercultural and multicultural education as if there was only one type of each, as there are different types of both multicultural and intercultural education. More traditional and conservative approaches focus on learning to get along and learning about different cultures. The most critical approaches focus on social justice as a core value, promoting democracy and working against prejudice and discrimination.

In conclusion, it is not the only composition of the class that makes the difference, but how the teacher approaches the cultural diversity of the class. Cultural diversity does not only refer to ethnicity and race, but also to, among other things, gender, class, language, sexual orientation and religion, which in turn means in practice that almost all the classes are culturally diverse. Furthermore, students identify themselves in more ways than one. Ethnicity is an important aspect, but not the only one. Multicultural and intercultural education around the world will face very complex classes of students with hybrid or parallel identities. As Ladson-Billings (2004) points out, traditional classifications of race, class, and gender are no longer useful to scholars and practitioners due to "complexities of identities that do not fit into fixed categories".

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