

Cultural Diversity and the Culture of Diversity in Education

SERDENCUC Nadia Laura
Stefan cel Mare University, Suceava, Romania
e-mail: nadianutu@yahoo.com

Received 12.06.2014; Accepted 18.07. 2014

Abstract:

The presence of „the difference” in education is a fact sustained by the meeting between educational actors, in terms of negotiation on individual and social values. Therefore learning experiences offered to students have to be constructed in a multifaceted manner. The contemporary society highlights the difference in terms of its potential, rising it up to a principle level in educational philosophy. The cultural diversity in education refers to those structures that sustain plurality, both regarding the functionality of the educational process and the behavior of educational actors, in a genuine perspective of the difference management. The perspective of cultural diversity crosses and reorganizes entire educational area on global coordinates and, at the same time, embraces local specificity in terms of consistency and intensity. That is why we register an increased level of coherency regarding speeches on this theme and the proposed standards, while regarding the theory-practice balance, there are still enough discontinuities.

Keywords: *education, learning experiences, plurality in education, culture of diversity in education, management of cultural diversity, educational policies*

1. Introduction

On what coordinates is „the difference” present in education? Can we speak about a „culture of diversity” as a reality of contemporary education? Can we liaise the school culture to the culture of diversity in education? What can we say about the link between the culture of diversity and the cultural diversity in schools?

Our attempt to structure the possible interpretations of these interrogative dimensions is a challenging and a difficult one. The challenge is launched by the transfer of the difference in education without providing concrete directions for its management. The absence of theoretical foundation, the variety of meanings generated by the richness or because of the inconsistent terminology, the emphasized dynamic of change and, sometimes, the lack of balance between theory and practice also raise difficulties in interpretation.

However, the presence of *the difference* in education is a certainty and below are some arguments to sustain it:

-the necessity of considering the difference in education is stated by a teaching principle (*the principle of considering the age and the individual particularities in education* which extends

further in *the individualized, personalized and differentiated instruction*) and then is transferred to the entire normativity of the teaching activity following the principles' interdependence;

-the unity of educational finalities must not lead us to an uniformity perspective because unity does not exclude diversity;

- learning experiences are constructed in a multifaceted manner and generate a variety of curriculum types (C. Cretu, 2009);

-the difference is a default component of the individual's development and education must offer relevant projects for sustaining *the global succes* of the beneficiaries in an individualised and multifunctional perspective (C. Cretu, 1997);

-the meeting between educational actors has to follow the negotiation rules regarding the variety of values (C. Cucos, 2008).

The functionality of the educational systems integrates the difference at all levels: the inputs, the procedural structure and the outputs. The presence of the difference in education is not a recent fact. Considering the difference valuable in itself is the new approach that generates new formative actions: „the care for the difference” becomes a principle of educational philosophy in structuring learning experiences. The modern trends in educational sciences sustain this perspective.

2.The culture of diversity in the contemporary instruction

The second half of the 20th century shows us a tendency of an increased differentiation and diversification regarding the internal processuality of the instruction (I. Cerghit, 2002, p.151). The variety of situations in teaching–learning activities requires the use of complementary and alternative training systems.

Based on a few coordinates of the differentiated and personalized education philosophy, C. Cretu (1998) sustains that there are differences of rhythm, quantity, depth of understanding and style regarding students' learning (p.14).

Without having the intention to transform the differences identification process into an objective itself, teachers must make the proof of a real understanding regarding the differences' potential and, as a result, to build the learning process and its axiological and epistemic bases on new dimensions. (A. Nedelcu, 2002).

„The democratisation of education”, states R. Iucu (2001) is a phase focused on developing individuality in the spirit of plural values. That is why the reconstruction of educational sciences in postmodernist times is based on the „plurality rationality” (L. Barlogeanu, 2002), far beyond a single model for access to value.

The contemporary time requires an educational philosophy approach that recognizes the differences between individuals and the fact that „equity is not synonymous with equality” (C. Cretu, 1998).

The school culture is a „multilevel and multidimensional reality” structured on following coordinates: a directly observable school culture (a formal dimension) and a less observable school culture (an informal dimension, a hidden part of the school culture). (E. Paun, 2002).

We sustain the concept *culture of diversity* starting from the following arguments: the etymological meaning of *culture*- cultivation of the soul and mind in terms of personal development based on cultural coordinates regarding the *savoir's* determinism, according O. Reboul (apud C. Cucos,1997), the capacity to transfer and to value knowledge in different contexts based on *self reactivity* coordinates, the presence of *the difference* as a structuring principle of postmodern reality.

Beyond the knowledge and values incorporation, determined by a cognitive procesuality generated by the significance of terms, we can observe a certain relation between the subject engaged in a knowledge activity and the set of values related to the affective- attitude component of self, as well the capacity to operate with different meanings interpreting social behavior.

We conclude affirming that the culture of diversity in education represents those informational structures responsible of sustaining the plurality, both regarding the process and the behavior of educational actors (without ignoring the social mission of education), following norms and intentions that materialize educational policies, focused on the stimulation and promotion of the cultural diversity in a genuine, positive manner.

3.The culture of diversity as a component of the school culture

The information isn't an objective itself but plays a mediator role regarding the plurimodal perspectives of exploring and interpreting the reality.

Beyond the formal approach regarding *the culture of diversity* in education, there is also an informal dimension of it, hidden in the school culture. According to this perspective and considering all the arguments stated before, the presence of diversity can be found in an implicit or an explicit manner in the school culture, but its level of intensity in expression varies depending on the analised educational system. To what extent can we talk about a coherence regarding the culture of diversity in education, that is the hardest thing to know because beyond the informational aspects, the factual data and the observable and measurable behavior there is also an affective-attitudinal component that cannot be appreciated directly.

There are enough signs to help us understand that education is done in the spirit of *cultural diversity*, so far as we can observe a frequency and a constancy regarding the concern for diversity viewed as resource both in a theoretical and a normative perspective, associated with the interest for its transfer to educational practice. In education we can find this as a guiding principle of educational phylosophy, as a content structure (underlying learning experiences) and as a structure generating the learning environment.

P. Dasen and A.N. Perret-Clermont (1995) affirm that respecting differences both in educational practices and at the level of educational policy is the reflection of a social and a cultural ethnocentric position. Such a perspective is possible because, on the one hand the „respecting diversity” theme calls for the recognition of *the other* as a reality and, on the other hand, it risks an ambiguous use of terms dissimulating some sort of ignorance regarding this fact. Respecting differences in a genuine manner calls for an open attitude in a space of dialogue, sustaining the

communication and generating the boomerang effect of discovering *the other* in a way that rises questions about your own self, gaining the community level in the process of its extension.

N. Burbules (apud Ulrich, 2005) analyzes some changes generated by the usage of *the difference* concept in education, warning us that we can both face a positive meaning (as an opportunity to develop a democratic civic culture for nurturing empathy and for stimulating the exploration behavior on cultural and historical coordinates) and a negative one (wrongly associated with a few segregation and differentiation trends adopted by some communities in their attempt to refuse assimilation and to place themselves against rules and values of dominant society).

If the cultural diversity perspective crosses and reorganizes education in a global view, the coherence and the intensity of behavior is customized on local coordinates.

If educational policy speeches and institutional rules sustain the culture of diversity in education, when it comes about the balance between theory and practice in education there are still enough discontinuities.

The cultural affiliation is a source of differentiation and generates the cultural diversity reality. Given the implications caused by the usage of this concept related to ethnicity, regarding educational field there are multiple reactions determined by a variety of factors.

The culture of diversity in education supports the expression of cultural diversity as a specific hypostasis of difference – the source of plurality.

Education and culture meet each other on the relevant formative effects' field related to a sum of spiritual values, effects identified both at the social and at the individual level (S. Cristea and C. Constantinescu, 1998).

4. Conclusion

The new hypostases for cultural diversity offered by education are influenced by its relation with the knowledge (C. Cucos, 2003) which, according to the contemporary coordinates, naturally includes the plurality. The change of the perspective regarding the type of knowledge acquired through education is generated by the thought that the knowledge is not anymore a final given entity, a static, reliable and unique reality, but a permeable, an opened, a dilemmatic and a plural one. The plurality of knowledge is emphasized by the multiplicity of approaches regarding the cultural specificity in its variety of expression.

In education, the difference is a familiar construct and the contemporary approaches generate some additional meanings placing it next to the values field and in accordance with the educational philosophy coordinates. The intensity and the frequency of concerns, associated with the valorisation of diversity through the educational policy's actions and the attempt to articulate the educational practices with this intentionality, are enough arguments for structuring the culture of diversity as a reality of contemporary educational space. The school culture includes the culture of diversity at the formal or at the informal level. At the intersection between culture and education

there is a place where the cultural diversity is visible as a hypostasis for the difference generating a valuable potential.

References:

- [1] Barlogeanu, L. (2002). *Paradigma educațional-umanistă în contextul postmodernității*. In E. Paun and D. Potolea (coord.). *Pedagogie. Fundamentări teoretice și demersuri aplicative*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
- [2] Cerghit, I. (2002). *Sisteme alternative și complementare de instruire*, in E. Paun and D. Potolea (coord.). *Pedagogie. Fundamentări teoretice și demersuri aplicative*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
- [3] Cretu, C. (1997). *Psihopedagogia succesului*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
- [4] Cretu, C. (1998). *Curriculum diferențiat și personalizat*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
- [5] Cretu, C. (2009). *Teoria și metodologia curriculumului*. In C. Cucos (coord.). *Pedagogie pentru examenele de definitivare și grade didactice*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
- [6] Cristea, S.; Constantinescu, C. (1998). *Sociologia educației*. Pitesti: Hardiscom Publishing House.
- [7] Cucos, C. (1997). *Minciună, contrafacere, simulare- o abordare psihopedagogică*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
- [8] Cucos, C. (2003). *Tendențe ale mondializării, internaționalizării și virtualizării educației. Sfidări la adresa formării profesorilor*, in L. Iacob and D. Salavastru (coord.) *Psihologia socială și Noua Europă. In honorem Adrian Neculau*, Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
- [9] Cucos, C. (2008). *Educație-iubire, edificare, desăvârșire*, Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
- [10] Dasen, P.; Perret-Clermont, A.-N. (1995). *L'évolution récente de la recherche et des pratiques pédagogiques interculturelles en Suisse. Vers un changement de paradigme?* Postface au vol. E. Pogliani; A.-N. Perret-Clermont, A. Gretler, P. Dasen, *Pluralité culturelle et éducation en Suisse*, Bern, Edition scientifique europeennes.
- [11] Iucu, R. (2001). *Instruirea școlară-perspective teoretice și aplicative*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
- [12] Nedelcu, A. (2002). *Abordarea pedagogică a diversității culturale în școală*, in E. Paun and D. Potolea (coord.). *Pedagogie. Fundamentări teoretice și demersuri aplicative*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.

[13] Păun, E. (2002). *O “lectura” a educatiei prin grila postmodernitatii*, in E. Paun and D. Potolea (coord.). *Pedagogie. Fundamentări teoretice și demersuri aplicative*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.

[14] Ulrich, C. (2005). *Educatia civică și “proiectul intercultural”*,. In L. Barlogeanu, A. Crisan (coord.) *Ghid de politici interculturale*, Bucharest: Humanitas Educational Publishing House.