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Planting the Seeds of Multiculturalism in Adult Education: The Case of Slovenia

Abstract: Multiculturalism in popular discourse in the media and in politics has been one of the most used and widely circulated terms. Based on the idea of promoting diversity, Multiculturalism has become an indisputable fact of life in today's world. (Glazer, 1997) However, managing multiculturalism is indeed a challenge at different levels. In education, there have been endeavours to promote equity and justice in education. By reviewing conceptions of multicultural education from the field's leading scholars, the authors seek to draw guiding principles to be compared with the Slovenian context in order to develop a framework for implementing mulriculturalism in Slovenian adult education.

Keywords: multiculturalism, culture, education, diversity, slovenia.

Introduction

The 21st century with its globalization societies, puts emphasis on citizenry that is internationally oriented and culturally sensitive. Bennett (Bennett, 2001) defines culture as a society's shared beliefs, social values, worldviews, and preferred standards of behaving. Taken in that perspective, we will try to define the concepts of multiculturalism, diversity in relation with education. In the first part of this article we discuss multiculturalism and diversity definitions and we present conceptions of multicultural education from the field's leading scholars, in order to draw guiding principles to be compared with the realities of Slovenian education system. In the second part we evoke the Slovenian historical and educational context in relation with diversity and multicultural principles and we describe our propositions towards multicultural education in Slovenia.

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Defining Multiculturalism

Unfortunately, in all the constant debate around the term no clear consensual definition of the concept has been offered. For instance, Multiculturalism can be defined as (Willet, 1998); "a political, social, and cultural movement which aimed to respect a multiplicity of diverging perspectives outside of dominant traditions", or "Multiculturalism is the way to describe how social structures create and maintain different cultures in a society" (Wekker, 1998: 44). We might also cite Rosado for whom, "*Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviours that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society*. (Rosado, 2006) Multiculturalism is then viewed as a "system," a set of interrelated parts (beliefs and behaviours) which make up the whole of how humans experience today's world.

In a historical perspective, the question of multiculturalism has been central to the political concerns of Europe, and North America since 1945, however, European countries were mostly interested in issues about immigration, the ways in which immigrants might settle in Western Europe since the 1950s and 1960s (with the growing numbers of political refugees and asylum seekers in Western Europe), and in the wake of terrorist threats and attacks, they were seriously concerned with the dangers posed by unassimilated immigrant groups.

The problem which societies face is how to reconcile between the demands of the modern state and the aspirations of minorities to preserve their ethnic, religious and linguistic "identity" or difference. This "pluralist dilemma" calls for ways to balance national integration and strong social cohesion, on one hand, with the demand for the affirmation and incorporation of minority culture on the other, (May, 1999) Up until now, the experiences of Europe and America seem to hold as many success as failures, for the criticism of multiculturalism has become more and more fiery and intense. The major thesis of critics of multiculturalism is that it hardens ethnic boundaries and poses a threat to the civic realm's ability to guarantee personal autonomy and neutrality. The strength and cohesion of the state requires a high degree of homogeneity among its citizens. The need to acknowledge formally ethnic, religious and linguistic differences of minorities leads to a cult of ethnicity, weakens the common culture, and fragments the nation as a whole[3]. However, in an age of ever increasing cultural pluralism, multiculturalism

[3] A review of the critique of Multiculturalism springing from American authors (regardless of their ideological affiliations) could be found in the works of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society.* New York: W. W. Norton, 1998; Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus.* New York: Free Press, 1991; Allan D. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind.*

has become an indisputable fact of life in today's world and constitutes a trend that is unlikely to be ignored. (Glazer, 1997; Gignac, 1997) Therefore, managing multiculturalism becomes a challenge both at the governance as well as managerial levels. Public and private organisations are increasingly realising vast diversity within the global realm and devising strategies to make the most out of it. In essence, then, multiculturalism is nothing more than the art of managing diversity in a total quality manner (Rosado, 2006) and this brings it down to the cardinal question: How do we manage multiculturalism and diversity?

Managing Diversity and multicultural education:

By "diversity" is meant *all the differences that people bring to an organization or group* (Rosado, 2006), this implies that managing diversity should be a comprehensive, holistic process that unleashes the various talents and capabilities which a diverse population brings to an organization, community or society, so as to create a wholesome, inclusive environment, that is "safe for differences," and maximizes the full potential of all.

We should now ask whether there is any place within schools for diversity i.e. the perpetuation of different languages and cultures and what would be the income of such endeavours. Based on the assumption that multicultural education increases students' self-esteem and enhances their performance, many researches led by educators (especially in America and Canada) have yielded significant results. According to Spina (2006) students who have been exposed to more than one culture have cognitive advantages in that they are more able to consider a variety of ideas which affects the scope of their creativity. As of students who come from minority backgrounds, they need to feel that their culture is respected and they are able to creatively bridge the gap between their own culture and that of the mainstream, especially when teachers assist this process.

In an attempt to present principles of multicultural education, we review conceptualizations produced by several of the field's leading voices, we will refer to the work of American authors including Sonia Nieto (Nieto, 2000), Christine Sleeter (Sleeter, 1996), Carl Grant with Sleeter (Grant and Sleeter 1998), and James Banks (Banks, 2004). While each of these scholars frames multicultural education uniquely, they agree on several key principles as shown on the table hereafter.

New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987; Rush Limbaugh, *The Way Things Ought to Be.* New York: Pocket Books, 1992; Russel Jacoby, *The myth of Multiculturalism.* New Left Review [November-December 1994]: 121-126.

Table 1: Principles of Multicultural Education (Adapted from Gorski, 2006)

Basic principles	Authors and tenets
Securing Social Justice	All students are entitled to an "equal opportunity to learn in school" (Banks, 2004: 3) [Multicultural education] challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) (Nieto, 2000: 305). Multicultural education should "make visible issues facing different social groups in our society" (Bailey & Desai, 2005: 40).
Reforming Schools Comprehensively	Multicultural education is calling "for the reform of the entire classroom and the school itself" (Grant & Sleeter, 1998: 63). States that multicultural education must permeate school climate, culture, and practice—that it must be visible everywhere, including decision-making processes such as textbook adoption, behaviour policies, and program assessment. (Nieto, 2000)
Critically Analyzing Systems of Power and Privilege	"To implement multicultural education in a school, we must reform its power relationships... The institutional norms, social structures, cause-belief statements, values, and goals of the school must be transformed" (Banks, 2004: 23). "multicultural education should also direct our attention to concentrations of power and wealth in the hands of a small elite" (Sleeter, 1996: 137).
Eliminating Educational Inequities	Multicultural education is —a movement to "increase educational equity for a range of cultural, ethnic, and economic groups" (Banks, 2004: 7).
Improving Education for All Students	Cultural, ethnic, and language diversity provide the nation and the schools with rich opportunities to incorporate diverse perspectives, issues, and characteristics into the nation and the schools in order to strengthen both. (Banks et al., 2001: 5)

A brief exploration of each of these normative principles shows us how broad the agenda of multicultural education and how demanding can be the efforts to implement its principles. The emphasis on social justice and eradicating inequalities is deliberate to distinguish between depoliticized multicultural education largely criticized by authors (Gorski, 2006) and the set of principles established by scholars in the domain. Taken in the perspective of North American experiences, Christine Sleeter remarks that, "A major problem with most staff development programs for multicultural education is that the unit of change on which they focus is the *individual* rather than the [*institution*] as an organization" (Sleeter, 1992). Such change must be paralleled by a change in the culture and structure of the organization, and to be effective it needs a longitudinal approach involving staff leadership as well as educators. If that has been the case of

the American multicultural education model, to what extent are the principles of diversity and multiculturalism applied in the Slovenian system of Education?

The Slovenian case: historical Background

As history shows us, Slovenia was never a part of the "eastern block", before 1989, it belonged to what was called the Yugoslavian republic, a country renowned under Marshall Tito with its prosperity, its cultural and ethnic mosaic and with its communistic system albeit sympathetic and open to the west with its unallied policy.

Therefore, Slovenian citizens enjoyed freedoms unparallel in socialist countries, with a standard of living that was equal to European countries, free education, medical care, welfare and jobs (due to the presence of workers self-management companies and an active private sector) were all indicators of the success of the Yugoslavian model of unified multicultural society. (Begant, 2009) However, all that changed after Tito's death and the dismemberment of Yugoslavia during the 1980's and the 1990's, the economic turmoil fuelled anger and separatist movements in the former federations. Since the developments of the late 1980s and early 1990s showed that it would not be possible to reach a consensual agreement on some other organisational form for Yugoslavia or on succession, the Republic of Slovenia unilaterally declared its independence on 25th June 1991, and ten days war ensued. Slovenia was able to achieve its national independence at a quite low price by avoiding consequences of this conflict, but the main losers of this transition were immigrants from other Yugoslav republics in Slovenia who were not given Slovenian citizenship. (Zakošek, 2007)

From then on, Slovenia remained well advanced compared to its neighbours Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Kosovo, and its economic performance among the new countries joining the E.U was outstanding[4]. What about demographics and minorities in Slovenian society?

Population of Slovenia

On the 1st January 2010 the population of Slovenia consisted of 1.014.107 men and 1.032.869 women. Foreign citizens represented 4 % of the total population of Slovenia[5]. Most inhabitants are Slovenian (83,1% – census from 2002).

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[4] Statistics show that Slovenia's GDP Per Capita makes it No.30 in world rankings. Economy Watch http://www.economywatch.com/economicstatistics/ Slovenia/GDP_Per_Capita_PPP_US_Dollars/year-2008/

[5] http://www.stat.si/eng/novica_prikazi.aspx?id=3088

The Italian community in the coastal area and the Hungarian community in the northeast are autochthonous minorities; their rights are protected by the Constitution. **Other ethnic minorities are** Croatians, Serbs, Bosnians, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Albanians. There is also a Roma community in Slovenia; its status and special rights are regulated by the law. The majority of the population is Roman Catholic. There are also more than thirty other religious communities in Slovenia that have officially registered their activities[6]. Therefore, as a whole, the Slovenian society with its ethnic and religion components seems to be largely homogeneous, but with the growth of minorities and immigration, we might suppose that there will be issues related to assimilation and integration similar to situations known in other European countries. To indicate the relevance of the integration in Slovenian policy, we can cite two resolutions (a *Resolution on Immigration Policy* adopted by the national assembly in 1999 and a the 2002 *Resolution on Migration Policy)* that did state that integration is one of the three constituent parts of Slovenia's migration policy adding the prevention of discrimination, xenophobia and racism. In both resolutions, integration is linked to so-called 'Slovene values'; it is interpreted as a right to preserve migrants' own culture, which has to be practiced, however, according to the 'basic values of the Republic of Slovenia' (Pajnik, 2007). We might now turn our attention to the place of multicultural diversity programs in Slovenian education system.

Diversity Education in Slovenia

Prior to 1990, the education system was controlled by the State and its content was influenced by Marxism and socialism. A huge financial and ideological support was offered to citizenship educational programmes simultaneously with the then well developed self-management, a form of employees' participation in the management of companies, factories and institutions. (Emeršič, 2000) There was an urgent need to implement reforms after 1991, especially after the democratisation of society and the will to join the E.U. The methodology used in our research is based upon using the available information about official and NGO education programs.

Presently, Slovenia has three public and one private University. Over the last decade have come into existence several "higher schools" i.e. professional schools providing for two- year education leading to professional qualifications, thus considerably democratising tertiary education.

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[6] http://www.infotujci.si/vsebina.php?id=51

Overall, there was a trend more towards curriculum for practical subjects rather than subjects as History or Sociology, although compelling to European standards in education led to more "ethics and citizenship education[7]" based programs and multicultural NGO education endeavours. We might cite the work of Amnesty International Slovenia and EIP – School for Peace; with the help of UNESCO ASP Net Schools, beginning since 2000, they started programs on human rights education and tolerance using participative learning, learning by doing, volunteer work, and civil society activism. The EIP national long term educational programme in expert cooperation with Council of Europe/Directorate of Youth and Sport is based upon translating the Council of Europe's manual COMPASS[8] into Slovenian as well as educating licensed national trainers who are performing workshops for young people at schools and in non-formal settings. (Begant, 2009) These workshops are on active citizenship, democracy, discrimination and xenophobia, right to quality education, right to living in healthy environment, children's rights, gender equality, globalisation, rights to health and human security, media, poverty, sport and social rights.

We can note in official adult education the curricula for "History" and "Ethics and citizenship education"[9] that the learning of active democracy and democratic procedures should derive from real examples, authentic sources and based on respect to human rights values. At the short-cycle tertiary level of education at all 25 study programmes there is not a single subject which includes Multiculturalism or promotes diversity[10]. For instance, the adult education programmes financed by Ministry of Education, which are oriented into work with Roma, migrants, asylum seekers and/or new residents of Slovenia aim to foster assimilation, by offering learning about Slovenia, its constitution, legal instruments and moral and social codes of Slovenians but there is no indication of attempts to integrate the culture of minorities within the curricula.

From the available data on Slovenian education system, we might conclude that multicultural and diversity programs are not present in any official form, except through extracurricular activities such as European programmes of exchanges or in the work of school student's parliaments.

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[7] Today there is a special compulsory subject called "Ethics and citizenship education" in 8th and 9th grade of compulsory education. The same goes for the history lessons in compulsory education: after the Second World War topic the period of living in Yugoslavia is briefly mentioned and followed by a larger chapter on Slovenian independency and Slovenia in EU. Source: http://www.zrss.si/default.asp?link=predmet&tip=6&pID=34&rID=411

[8] Official COMPASS website: http://www.eycb.coe.int/compass/

[9] Source: www.zrss.si/doc/OSO_drzavljanska_vzgoja_in_etika.doc

[10] Sources: http://www.cpi.si/visjesolski-studijski-programi. aspxhttp: //www.mss.gov.si/ si/delovna_podrocja/ visje_strokovno_izobrazevanje/programi_v_visjem_strok_izobrazevanju/

In general, it seems that Slovenian education system is trying to catch up with other European education programs, but it is still far from implementing diversity and multicultural principles as practised for instance in Canada or America. We might contend that this is due to the ethno cultural context of the Slovenian society itself, however, we suppose that with the economic change and migration flows; soon the need for a broader diversity policy will eventually prevail.

Ultimately, to implement multicultural education principles in Slovenia, we must have a broader scope and a long term vision; a multidisciplinary approach that combines social, cultural and organizational changes should be considered as well. We can propose some guiding principles, which seem to us indispensable in any attempt to develop multicultural education programs in Slovenia including:

- The need to benchmark adult multicultural education programs in other European countries;
- Establishing programs or dedicated books/periodicals to have professors and teachers well acquainted with multicultural and diversity principles and methodologies;
- The efforts (of ministry of education and concerned organizations) to uphold the work of NGO's and other partners that promote diversity and multiculturalism by preparing cooperative activities and seminars in universities and high schools in which students are asked to participate;
- Designing some curricular activities for high-school and university students that might include writing subjects or projects about multicultural and diversity issues, cognitive and social perspective should be essential to help students draw their own conclusions about learning new dialects/language, customs, religions, etc.;
- Reviewing and analyzing the performance of multicultural programs based on clear indicators (number of students and teachers participating in diversity programs, number of multicultural courses taught, the number of students passing them …) and having measures of correcting the lacks and pitfalls that may occur.

There are numerous models of multicultural programs and practices across the world; nonetheless, we might represent our framework of Slovenian multicultural education in the following figure:
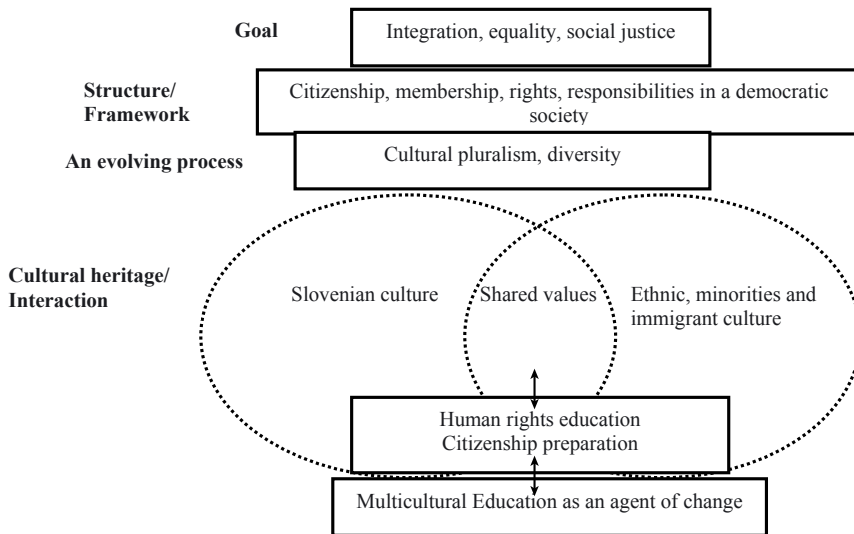
Figure 1: The role of Slovenian Multicultural education
Source: Adapted from Elliston, 1996

Figure 1 proposes that within the Slovenian society, education should be regarded as an agent of change and its goal is to prepare individuals to gain equal access to the opportunity structure of the society. Citizenship roles, rights and responsibilities provide a useful framework as a starting point for understanding social organizations and their functioning, recognizing barriers to access and entitlement and the identification of attitudes, knowledge and skills required for their removal.

Conclusion

Education for effective citizenship is a significant goal of schooling. Preparing people for membership in a society increasingly diverse with respect to factors such as race and ethnicity, gender, faiths, social class, etc. underscores the need for this focus. It does, however open a whole area for reflection and decisions about content and outcomes, and about plans, programs and strategies to achieve desired outcomes.

The principles of multicultural education are all encompassing and therefore, unfortunately, cannot be implemented all at once over the course of a short

period, especially if the educators and officials are not aware of the disparities that the school system seems to perpetuate.

It is essential to understand that what is at issue in multicultural/diversity education is not just sensitivity to other cultures and racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups that are marginal to the dominant culture, nor a transference of power, but an entire *paradigm shift*—a change in the integrated whole of our human perceptions, values, and actions. The essence of managing diversity concerns not only acknowledgement of the "Other", but more importantly, the diversity of thinking systems, from the value systems of which emerge the intolerance toward others. In that view, the role of the teachers in the education system is vital, they have to start thinking from both a critical standpoint and a multicultural perspective (Moss, 2001).

Slovenia's education strategy in its planning needs to restate its vision in the image of today's learner and of the society as a whole where the full range of diversity and identities is honoured and where the teaching of human rights principles and understanding of issues of social justice become the foundation of the curriculum in preparing students to be effective students nationally and globally.

Finally, the Slovenian society, although part of the European societies, has its special characteristics that we hope we might be able to study and to pinpoint their interactions/role with regard to how they affect diversity in schools and universities in a prospective research. In a broader outlook, we also believe that a comparative enquiry of multiculturalism in Slovenian educational system with other European countries (another interesting extension of our work) might bring about interesting findings concerning studies of multiculturalism in Europe as a whole.

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Uključivanje multikulturalizma u obrazovanje odraslih: slučaj Slovenije

Abstrakt: U popularnom diskursu u medijima i politici multikulturalizam je jedan od najčešće korišćenih i široko rasprostranjenih izraza. Zasnovan na ideji promocije različitosti, multikulturalizam je postao nesporna činjenica života u današnjem svetu (Glejzer, 1997). Međutim, uključivanje multikulturalizma je zaista izazov na različitim nivoima. U obrazovanju je bilo nastojanja da se promovišu jednakost i pravda. Pregledom shvatanja vodećih naučnika o multikulturalnom obrazovanju, autori nastoje da daju vodeće principe koji se upoređuju sa slovenačkim kontekstom, u cilju razvijanja okvira za sprovođenje multikulturalizma u obrazovanju odraslih u Sloveniji.

Ključne reči: multikulturalnost, kultura, obrazovanje, raznolikost, slovenija.

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