



## MULTICULTURALISM: A CHALLENGE FOR EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

This manuscript briefly presents some aspects about multiculturalism and its influences on education. The objective of manuscript was to study the relevance of learning regarding the characteristics of multiculturalism for school education. It is a work done through bibliographic studies. The theoretical background comes from scholars such as Del Priore (2008); Canen (2007); Werneck (2008) etc. The knowledge about multiculturalism and its socioeconomic and socio-cultural dynamics is of vital importance to students of primary and secondary education, both in Brazil and in the world. It is through the perception of the coexistence between different cultures and their differences that the new generations may become more tolerant and sensitive to issues related to social life, respect for others and human dignity.

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## INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism or cultural pluralism is a concept elaborated to categorize the presence of diverse, sometimes divergent cultures existing in a region of a particular country, having in common at least one predominant characteristic. The concept of multiculturalism indicates both a fact (societies are constituted of culturally distinct groups) and politics (put into operation at different stages), in this context, all seek the harmonious coexistence between different ethnic groups. Multi-cultural societies coexisted at every stage of human history. However, today less than 10% of the planet's nations can be considered as culturally homogeneous.

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On the other hand, the political treatment of cultural diversity is a relatively recent phenomenon (DEL PRIORE, 2008, p. 1). According to Werneck (2008: 429), multiculturalism "[...] may consist of the juxtaposition or presence of various cultures in the same society and also in the relationship between them. On the other hand, for some authors it would be more appropriate to use the term interculturalism, since for these authors the suffix "inter" would imply a view of cultures in relation to and not the simple composition of multiple cultures (CANEN, 2007). In the understanding of Gonçalves e Silva (2003), multiculturalism is like a game of differences in which social actors define rules in the context of social struggles. These actors are confronted with experiences related to discrimination and prejudice in the social structure of the organized groups to which they belong and with whom they coexist (CANEN; OLIVEIRA, 2002).

Regarding education, the importance of discussing the multiple aspects of multiculturalism within the school is undeniable, given the unmistakable pluricultural and multifaceted reality that exists in Brazil and in the world. However, educating for cultural diversity is a challenge for educators, especially in Brazil, where unfavorable socioeconomic conditions and disregard for education are historical and structural problems.

With regard to the influence on the theme of cultural and ethnic diversity, multiculturalism can be understood as a kind of threat to the identity of a particular nation. The presence of diverse and distinct cultures and languages provokes feelings of xenophobia in some countries. As an example, we have Canada, where its inhabitants speak the French language as the English language. Other conflicts can be identified on the European continent, as is the case of France and its troubled relationship with Algeria and its immigrants, in this case there is a relationship based on ethnic prejudice, xenophobia and intolerance (VELASCO, 2014).

According to the author mentioned above, many of the European nations insist on maintaining the distance of any foreigner, for which he created and maintains the stereotype of the "foreigner inassimilable". The problem only tends to worsen, since in the last decades the difficulties have been intensified for the new generations of French descendants of foreigners, who by prejudice, are circumscribed to the suburbs and denoted by their origins as dangerous and subversive people (VELASCO, 2014). In the different scenarios of disagreements, foreigners are considered as a threat to the national identity of several countries, or as potential sources of disaggregation. They are also chosen as the primary targets of political speeches that inquire about the nation's real ability to accept cultures from other peoples. Due to such factors, it is common for foreigners to be accused of causing social and economic barriers, such as socioeconomic imbalances and rising unemployment. (LÉNAÏC HUET, 2001; VELASCO, 2014). In spite of several factors and circumstances mentioned earlier, Multiculturalism can be interpreted as a factor of enrichment and openness of new and diverse possibilities, as Wieviorka (1997), Wieviorka Ohana (2001) and Gruzinski (2000) attest, demonstrating that hybridity and malleability of crops are positive factors of innovation.

### **Multiculturalism and education: the school and cultural plurality**

Due to globalization, some modern societies have become societies marked by heterogeneity in terms of gender, ethnicity / race, religion, disability, cultural patterns, and so on. Within these categories arise ideological conflicts, which produces unequal rights of survival and individual action in the lived space. Such conflicts that reverberate negatively in the structure of a society for many years, leading to sociocultural and political problems and generating, in this historical context, conflicts of the subalternized individuals in search of their recognition and respect to their way of being, to think and to act. It is in this troubled scenario that educational institutions work and try to resolve prejudices that have long been ingrained. For some individuals, traditional educational institutions have the significance of continuing education within the family. On the other hand, signification is based on a kind of rupture, in which it is marked by the process of exclusion for those who do not have cultural capital, in the various ways it manifests itself, objectifying and institutionalizing to bring the existing codes into the school

universe (BOURDIEU; PASSERON, 2006, 2008; OLIVEIRA, 2012). The school consists of an open system that is part of the social superstructure formed by other institutions such as the church, the family, the media and others. The school environments are composed of children who are in the process of learning, coming from different social classes, customs, different physical and cultural aspects. Therefore, the role of educational institutions is of vital importance with regard to the possibilities of social change in a given society. In fact, knowing the multicultural reality that exists worldwide is the first step in understanding sociocultural diversity. It is from the recognition of the various differences between peoples that one can seek to develop respect for the individual and for the otherness that characterizes it. In the case of Brazil, Law 11645 in question helps the new generations to understand the socioeconomic and cultural differences that formed the history of Brazil. Thus, understanding can help to resolve prejudices that have long been rooted in the social imaginary of the Brazilian people, such as prejudiced representations of blacks and indigenous peoples. Blacks are suspected of committing crimes, just as they are targets in police approaches, they are victims of racial prejudice because of the color of their skin.

Cultural education in the school is a very complex subject, although the school reflects the cultural characteristics of the society in which it is inserted. The educator must possess or develop the sensitivity to perceive the multiple cultural differences with which his students live. From such differences cited, it will have the potential to elaborate pedagogical strategies that can attend to all. Once the cultural formation in the school is marked by plurality, the teacher must seek to work on themes that arouse students' interest and lead them to critical reflection on society and its political role as a citizen. In fact, the teacher has to educate the sensitivity of his students, making them understand the almost imperceptible dynamics in their totality, reality in all its dialectical complexity. That is, the teacher must make the students perceive the socio-cultural reality beyond stereotypes. An arduous task in a world marked by individualism, narcissism and fugacity (BAUMAN; BORDONI, 2014).

Think about a sensitive education within schools is to seek to value the specificities of each culture as well as its needs. In fact it is to value the diverse systems of knowledge existing in social groups. Perhaps this way, the socio-cultural formation of individuals in the school space can overcome the exclusionary guidelines of the current Brazilian educational system. Children entering school usually have a cultural baggage inherited from living with their parents and relatives. Children are influenced by other sources of information, such as the various social media currently available. Faced with such factors, the work of educating becomes difficult, since such knowledge acquired outside the school environment is often marked by racial, economic, place and origin prejudice, among many others. As Moser points out (2016: 45) "School management receives influences from the prevailing conception of administration in capitalist patterns and ends up manifesting the dominant relation of social exclusion, reinforcing existing social paradigms." In this sense, according to Moser, to recognize that the school is "a space for the reproduction of social relations, that is, the dynamics of social domination and exclusion present in society also determine the school dynamics." In this way, as observed by Severino, there is an inseparable interrelationship between society and education (2001, 72).

The discussion by Moser (2016) and Severino (2001) calls attention to the fact that the educational process in which the school is the main protagonist is indelibly associated with the sociocultural structure of the society in which the school is inserted. This intrinsic relation is perceived by the fact that the school is instituted by the same society, and it is part of its ideological apparatuses, hoping, therefore, that the school internalize in the conscience of the children and young people who attend it its sociocultural, moral and political values. However, the role of the school is to extrapolate this merely receptive and subservient character, since such a process may undergo transformations originating from the school itself. Indeed, such assertion is possible since the transformative power of education resides and is expressed in the construction of critical consciousness.

Regarding education, for Canen (2007), the construction of identities, differences and the challenges of multiculturalism imply in several discussions about curricula and multicultural attitudes. For the author cited, the obstacles that are present, especially in the educational area, in the complex and contemporary world, should not be reduced to looks that close in disciplinary fields of rigid borders. On the contrary, it is necessary to elaborate complex and hybrid responses (CANEN, 2007, p. 101). Faced with this perspective, there is a pressing need to associate with teachers' education a multicultural vision that enables them to be translated into their pedagogical actions. Regarding the topic discussed, Xavier and Canen (2005, p.336) stated that:

To form a multiculturalally oriented teacher implies, as we have argued, working on a model of teacher apt to understand knowledge and curriculum as discursive processes, marked by unequal power relations that participate in the formation of identities. It implies making an effort involving pre-established contents and pretensions to single truths, seeking to detect voices silenced and represented in these curricular discourses, in order to mobilize the construction of teacher identities sensitive to cultural diversity and able to formulate transformative discursive alternatives, challenging the freezing of identities and stereotypes. In this multicultural and dialogic scenario, the teacher has to teach and also to learn. This reality is based on the observation that the training of teachers does not prepare them for the confrontation of social realities that are dialectically conflicting and dissonant with the curricular guidelines. These guidelines are developed in parts by a generically idealized student model, dissociated from their concrete and often limiting experiences in various aspects.

This dialogue, nuanced by the multicultural context, to which the teacher needs to adjust, is contrary to Paulo Freire's (1987, 68) analysis of the educational process and the transmission of knowledge: "No one educates anyone, no one educates himself, men educate one another, mediated by the world." This is one of the greatest challenges facing education in the context of multiculturalism, that is, making learners aware that education is a process in which everyone is involved. Understanding the dynamics of diversity in all its forms is the basis of a more humane, understanding and harmonious society.

### Final considerations

Multiculturalism and education are intrinsically linked to the fact that while school is concerned with educating new generations about cultural pluralities, it also isolates those

individuals who are not part of the socially constructed standard accepted and advocated by its educational system. At this juncture emerges several problems related to education, specifically related to multiculturalities and their influences. It is therefore urgent to build an education of a truly democratic character, which has the potential to include in its agenda the production of effective knowledge about diversity both historically constructed and those from other lands and cultures. Thus, it is necessary that there is a multicultural conviviality aware of the differences and all its nuances, which necessarily involves respect for the other and frank dialogue with the values inherited from their culture. It is necessary to develop attitudes, curricular projects and pedagogical conceptions that are sensitive to the presence and influence of multiculturalism in the sociocultural reality of today's societies.

The teacher at school attempts to raise the sensitivity of the learner in the face of multicultural issues. However, the student at home or other places, through the mediums or in the conviviality with a group of friends, suffers the negative influences coming from prejudiced visions, xenophobic, racist and macho, all common in everyday discourses. Thus, ignorance of the historical-cultural, sociological aspects of diversity and exclusion does not only affect Indians and blacks, but also in their ignorance, those who are considered poor, uneducated or unintelligent. These are blamed for their personal ills, for their economic poverty and for their lack of formal education. That is, they are considered to be solely responsible for their failure. This perspective disregards the historical fallibility of the Brazilian State in generating effective public policies in the fight against poverty, in the elaboration of quality education, in the equal distribution of the riches produced in the Country.

Knowledge of diversity on the part of the new generations, and of the present generations, is of extreme relevance in order to overcome prejudice and intolerance, whatever they may be. However, it is necessary to educate for diversity and to show that the difference is mainly of social character, in which it is produced socially. To recognize the different is to know a little of oneself, is to understand that difference is what humanizes us and builds us as diverse social beings and so equal at the same time. The role of the teacher is limited in face of the social and economic conjunctures in which it operates, which places it in a delicate position in the process of interaction with its students. The teacher in some situations does not have the necessary materials to elaborate his classes, also does not have the time to treat certain subjects correctly; in short, its action against the various structural deficiencies is impaired. There are many challenges to multicultural education, such as the lack of pedagogical resources to enable better and more effective teaching conditions, and indifference to the education of Brazilian governments. However, in spite of the difficulties, it is necessary to educate the new generations so that they know and understand the multicultural reality irremediably present from remote ages in the life of the human beings and the societies that they constitute.

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