THE READINESS FOR THE MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Introduction and aim: The ideal model claims that people should respect each other with their initial identity, but do we really do so? It is an education that makes individuals learn specific skills and tells what is true and what is not. J. Banks states multicultural education as an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process. It should transform educational institutions so that they might more fully enable the participation of all citizens within multicultural society. How can we do that and when? Are children tolerant enough to build the "dream society" or how much ready they are to socialize with diverse people? We should mention that the national aims of the general education declare as the eighth point to prepare law-abiding and tolerant citizens. However, what is done for that practically? The fact is that, the only course where the culture is taught is the "world culture" – additional classes in IX, X, XI grades. So, it means that schools before IX grade do not do anything for their students to be culturally conscious, because all the other courses provide facts from a single attitude. We suggest that children in lower grades are more open-minded and willing to be more tolerant than in high school.

Research methodology: To understand when children should start multicultural education, a comparative analysis is more reliable. For the comparative groups were chosen elementary and high school students. Accordingly, we have grouped two types of focus groups. The reason of choosing this technique was rather to explore more hided facts that have not been mentioned yet and to look at the problem from different dimension.

Results and implications: Surprisingly or not, data analysis of focus groups showed more readiness of the multicultural education among low-aged respondents. There is an awareness of multiculturalism in high school respondents, but the rate of tolerance is lower.

Conclusion: To sum up, according to the results we see that multicultural education should start in the lower ages. It is not enough to have a specific course where students will be taught that discrimination and bias are unjust, but rather, general education curriculum should provide encouragement to have critical thinking and intercultural awareness.

Keywords: multiculturalism, intercultural awareness, cultural consciousness, critical thinking

Understanding Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education

The term 'multiculturalism' is sometimes used to describe a condition of society; more precisely, it is used to describe a society where a variety of different cultures coexist. Perhaps the chief ways in which a country can be culturally diverse is by having different religious groups, different linguistic groups, groups that define themselves by their territorial identity and variant racial groups. Nowadays, megacities are represented with a variety of different nations, people with contrast cultural or ethnic background. We can easily define that not only big towns, but anywhere we go, we will not be surrounded by familiar environment that will resemble the past-century villages. Surprisingly, it is not authentic for very diverse individuals to come together in one

area and behave adequately, as we call it now. The attitude of the dominant groups towards minorities still appears to be an obstacle. After remembering racism and the struggles, group of individuals had gone through to deceive it, we might say that the language of hater could not be the issue anymore. Surely, we cannot compare racism with the cultural intolerance, but as long as it is in the nearby area, we can mention some comparisons. When we define multiculturalism, we should notice that culture dos not only include the values and traditions societies have, but rather there is a tone of other indicators, from which the most important is perceived to be religion and ethnicity.

Multicultural claims include a wide range of claims involving religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, and race. Culture is a contested, open-ended concept, and all of these categories have been subsumed by or equated with the concept of culture. Multiculturalism is closely associated with "identity politics," "the politics of difference," and "the politics of recognition," all of which share a commitment to revaluing disrespected identities and changing dominant patterns of representation and communication that marginalize certain groups (Gutmann 2003, Taylor 1992, Young 1990). Multiculturalism involves not only claims of identity and culture as some critics of multiculturalism suggest. It is also a matter of economic interests and political power: it includes demands for remedying economic and political disadvantages that people suffer as a result of their marginalized group identities.

Modern states are organized around the language and cultural norms of the dominant groups that have historically constituted them. Members of minority cultural groups face barriers in pursuing their social practices in ways that members of dominant groups do not. Some theorists argue for tolerating minority groups by leaving them free of state interference (Kukathas 1995, 2003). Others argue that mere toleration of group differences falls short of treating members of minority groups as equals; what is required is recognition and positive accommodation of minority group practices through what the leading theorist of multiculturalism Will Kymlicka has called "group-differentiated rights" (1995). Some group-differentiated rights are held by individual members of minority groups, as in the case of individuals who are granted exemptions from generally applicable laws in virtue of their religious beliefs or individuals who seek language accommodations in education and in voting.

With the multiple definitions and explanations, which have been made for over the past 30 years, there is not necessarily an agreed definition of multicultural education among scholars and practitioners. Multicultural education as a philosophical concept is built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity as acknowledged in various documents, such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence, constitutions of South Africa and the United States, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. The National Association for Multicultural Education defines that multicultural education affirms our need to prepare students for their responsibilities in an interdependent world. It recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society. It values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. It challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice. Multicultural education is a process that permeates all aspects of school practices, policies and organization as a means to ensure the highest levels of academic achievement for all students. It helps students develop a positive self-concept by providing knowledge about the histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse groups. It prepares all students to work actively toward structural equality in organizations and institutions by providing the knowledge, dispositions, and skills for the redistribution of power and income among diverse groups. Thus, school curriculum must directly address issues of racism, sexism, classism, linguicism, ablism, ageism, heterosexism, religious intolerance, and xenophobia. Multicultural education advocates the belief that students and their life histories and experiences should be placed at the center of the teaching and learning process and that pedagogy should occur in a context that is familiar to students and that addresses multiple ways of thinking. In addition, teachers and students must critically analyze oppression and power relations in their communities, society and the world.

The following research is to highlight the errors of the multicultural education in Georgia. We should mention that the national aims of the general education declare as the eighth point to prepare law-abiding and tolerant citizens. However, what is done for that practically? The fact is that, the only course where the culture is taught is the "world culture" – additional classes in IX, X, XI grades. So, it means that schools before IX grade do not do anything for their students to be culturally conscious, because all the other courses provide facts from a single attitude. How much culturally educated citizens are schools contributing to the state? As we glimpse the recent picture, there occurs an assumption that elementary school students are more culturally tolerant than high school students. Therefore, there is a need for the profound multicultural education that is collaborated by the National Association for Multicultural Education, and there is more accessibility for it in the early ages.

A Comparative Analysis of Focus Groups and Methodology

To understand when children should start multicultural education, a comparative analysis is more reliable. For the comparative groups were chosen elementary and high school students. Since we needed the technique which would be like organized discussion, interaction or collective activity, we decided to conduct focus groups. The focus group is defined to be a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research (Powell et al 1996).

Focus groups can help to explore or generate hypotheses (Powell & Single 1996) and develop questions or concepts for questionnaires and interview guides (Hoppe et al 1995; Lankshear 1993). They are however limited in terms of their ability to generalize findings to a whole population, mainly because of the small numbers of people participating and the likelihood that the participants will not be a representative sample. As interaction is the crucial feature of focus groups, it demonstrates participants' views of the world, the language they use about an issue (Kitzinger 1994). Focus groups give the researcher an opportunity to find out why an issue is salient and what is salient about it (Morgan 1988). Furthermore, when the participants feel themselves involved in decision making processes, that they are valued as experts and they have given a chance to work collaboratively with researchers, the trust is developed and the group may explore solutions to a particular problem as a unit, rather than as individuals Goss & Leinbach 1996). What more can be said about the advantages of the focus group is that it can become a forum for change, both during the focus group meeting itself and afterwards (Race et al 1994). The brilliant features mentioned above became the reason of choosing the technique of our research.

We have chose two age groups, first group included students in fourth grade and the second in twelfth grade. Each focus group constituted with seven students. The possible questions for each group were similar; however, we tried to make them age appropriate. The first subject of the discussion for each group was the following: which components make the culture. Surprisingly, if we compare the answers of first group with the second, we get more information rich results. The fourth grade students think that people with different culture have different language, ethnicity, food, clothes, music and dances (art), God (religion) and lastly mention skin color; when twelfth grade students name only religion, language and traditions. The second topic was about what they know about other cultures (any of them), what they like in them (any custom, piece of art, food, clothes). We should mention that they were absolutely free to list anything they wanted to. The first focus group showed more willingness to talk about different cultures, tried to remember anything they knew about the topic. It should not be surprising that their knowledge about different cultural customs is coming from the movies, cartoons and TV shows. Different cultures for them are associated with Asian (Indian, Chinese and Turkish) and Native American people. When we asked how they know that information, they replied that they love this music, dance, food and so on. On the other hand, the second group named Japanese, Asian (only Tibetan), European (only German) and American cultures. They prefer to talk about western habits they like (punctuality, law-

abiding), Japanese technological inventions, and Tibetan spirituality. They like to compare Georgians with western and discuss what should they learn or adopt from them, which values should the share; how the country can become more developed. It is obvious that the older respondents have aspiration for western way of living, which is identified with the culture. Surprisingly, when we asked to name more concrete customs they liked in other cultures they backed up. The second group tried not to be decisive and name well-defined position. When we asked to compare their native culture with other cultures and what resemblance did they see in any culture, if they did, the comments in the first focus group were the following: "how can we compare this to that? They are absolutely different." "What is common is that we are humans and they are humans…"- describing with having two eyes, two ears and so on; talking about biological likeness, but also mentioning color differences. When we went to a provocative question, asking which culture they thought to be better, they showed surprise; one commenting: "s/he is not better than me, I am not better than her/him." The other added: "we are all equal". The second focus group found the resemblance of Georgian culture with Russian, Greek and Asian cultures. We should mention that during this discussion they mentioned western habit standards (again) and listed what they should adopt from them.

For the third topic of discussion we asked to imagine the situation, where they had new classmate from other culture and to describe the possible reactions of the class and their own. The first focus group started talking about how amazing it would be, because they could make a party for the new classmate, imagine new plays and teach them theirs. When we asked if they wanted to go abroad in a very nice place and have new class, the answer was that they would prefer the first situation. For the second focus group the new classmate with different cultural background associate with different sexual orientation either. Some of the members of the second group had already experienced a classmate from USA and Syria. Interestingly, they emphasized about the Syrian classmates and claimed that after some time the class had got used to them and "no one in the school paid attention about that traditional thing they wore" (he was talking about hijab). Some other group members mentioned homosexual classmate, who as described, was abused, beaten and refused; "I don't feel proud of myself, although I have never touched him". The majority of group members agreed about putting "LGBT people" in a frame (when one mentioned that a foreigner wouldn't be a problem), however, not all of them had the facial expression of agreement. Compared to the first group the second one liked the idea about being exchange students (some of them had already been an exchange student). The reasons of preferring of being a "new one" in the class are: testing their abilities, widening horizons, seeing the world, learning new culture and practice language, getting information and new experiences. Interestingly, after that discussion, respondents opened the issue of foreigners in their country, what kinds of problems would they face with, how would they feel like and how their role – role of hosts should be like.

The fourth topic was about the multinationality; how would multinational Georgia be like and I whether they liked this idea or not. For the first focus group the questions were adapted for their age to make them fully understand the issue. Firstly reactions they replied showed amusement; but for the next they tried to make sure that their family and acquaintances would not get lost. The second focus group reacted with the phrases: "we are not ready for that yet"; "we need to protect ourselves from foreign investors"; "it will cause a high competition to get a job" (when we went deeply into the issue, they agreed that in the fair competition, they prefer to be defeated by Georgian, because Georgian might get that job and it is for the national project). When we asked whether immigrants must learn the Georgian language and adopt their values and traditions, they answered that immigrants already need to know local language to socialize with people, that they should know local values and traditions, however, there is no need for adopting them.

The fifth topic was given only to the second focus group, because of the content of the issue. We asked about oppression, discrimination and racism; what did they knew and feel about them. For the beginning all concurred that the mentioned above was unfair and they denounced it. Surprisingly, majority started talking about bullying and defining it as an act of aggression, where victim is the different from the aggressor. One of

the respondent mentioned racism towards white people by Afro-Americans. In general, all of them agreed that oppression, discrimination and racism are not an issue in Georgia. But how far we connect this attitude to the fact that high school students know very little about the theme mentioned above.

The data analysis has revealed some significant facts about the attitude, views and knowledge of two contrast-aged students. Although the majority of the answers of the first focus group, at first glance, can be perceived childish, they hide very crucial information for the researchers. When we analyze their answers, we can see an openness to get and give the knowledge about the cultures and true cultural tolerance. Surely, there is no need to compare them with the second focus group according to knowledge; however, our data shows that small-aged students know more cultures and their various dimensions, than the high school students. The first group openly defines the equality of people, when the second group interprets in a sensible way with the "learnt" argument. We are not trying to declare first or the second group as a winner. The only aim is to find the way to educate culturally tolerant and literate citizens.

Conclusion

In conclusion, according to the data analysis educational institutions are not prepared to implement multicultural education in their classrooms. Multicultural education requires a staff that is not only diverse, but also culturally competent. Educators must be aware, responsive and embracing of the diverse beliefs, perspectives and experiences. They must also be willing and ready to address issues of controversy. These issues include, but are not limited to, racism, sexism, religious intolerance, classism, ageism, so on. An ideal Multicultural education system creates a safe, accepting and successful learning environment for all, increases awareness of global issues, strengthens cultural consciousness and intercultural awareness, teaches students that there are multiple historical perspectives, encourages critical thinking and prevents prejudice and discrimination. For the beginning including multiculturalism in the curriculum should start from the elementary school. Therefore, to transform an institution, not only a curriculum, educational system needs to adopt the proper model and move from a banking model of education to a social justice approach.

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