

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: THEORY AND TEACHING PRACTICE

Session 4: Culture, identity, diversity, pluralism and intercultural dialogue in education

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Guiding Questions:

- What is identity and what influences its development?
- How can we understand culture?
- How does identity relate to status and how is status related to context?
- What roles can schools play in recognizing and using diversity within its community to enhance learning for all?
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Identity and Status

(excerpt from Huber & Reynolds, 2014, pp. 13-15)

The term identity denotes a person's sense of who they are and the self-descriptions to which they attribute significance and value. Most people use a range of different identities to describe themselves, including both personal and social identities. *Personal identities* are those identities that are based on personal attributes (e.g., caring, tolerant, extroverted, etc.), interpersonal relationships and roles (e.g. mother, friend, colleague, etc.) and autobiographical narratives (e.g. born to working-class parents, educated at a state school, etc.). *Social identities* are instead based on memberships of social groups (e.g. a nation, an ethnic group, a religious group, a gender group, an age or generational group, an occupational group, an educational institution, a hobby club, a sports team, etc.).

Some aspects of our identities are consistent over our lives. Other aspects of identity change as we gain skills and have different roles in life. Some aspects of our identities feel very central to who we are no matter where we are; others might feel more like background or depend on the situation.

These multiple identifications with different attributes, relationships, roles, narratives and social groups help people to define their own individuality and to position and orientate themselves in the world relative to other people. People often draw on different identities in different situations (e.g. husband in the family home, employee in the workplace).

In certain situations, an aspect of our identity will advantage us, place us in a “higher status” position. At other times, the reverse might be the case. An *achieved status* is one that is acquired on the basis of merit. It is a position that is earned or chosen and reflects a person's skills, abilities, and efforts. An *ascribed status*, on the other hand, is beyond an individual's control. It is not earned, but rather is something people are either born with or have no control over. (Beckerman 2009)

Some identities are labels that others put on us: while others see us as having that identity, we don't. In addition to the identities which people subjectively use to describe themselves, further identities may be ascribed to them by other people. However, these ascribed identities, which are often based upon visible characteristics such as ethnicity or gender, may not be identities to which individuals themselves attach any great importance. The inappropriate ascription of identities by others, and the experience of discrepancies between one's own preferred identities and other people's perceptions of the self, have been found to have adverse effects on people's psychological well-being and social adaptation.

Our collective identities are also typically complex; composed of multiple group associations each with different aspects and sub-identities. Scholars have mapped roughly 22 different elements that distinguish identities, including their level of relative importance, certainty, salience, positivity, active involvement, emotional attachment, choice or imposition, and so on. Under conditions of long-term stress and threat (economic hardship, oppression, violence, etc.) ethnic identities can converge toward monoliths where all dimensions of a group's identity -- such as ethnicity, religion and language -- collapse and become viewed as aligned. (Coleman, 2011)

Culture

(excerpt from Huber & Reynolds, 2014, pp. 15-17)

Cultural identities (the identities which people construct on the basis of their membership of cultural groups) are a particular type of social identity. Culture itself is a notoriously difficult term to define. This is because cultural groups are always internally heterogeneous groups that embrace a range of diverse practices and norms that are often contested, change over time and are enacted by individuals in personalised ways.

That said, distinctions can be drawn between the material, social and subjective aspects of culture. *Material culture* consists of the physical artefacts which are commonly used by the members of a cultural group (e.g. the tools, goods, foods, clothing, etc.); *social culture* consists of the social institutions of the group (e.g. the language, religion, laws, rules of social conduct, folklore, cultural icons, etc.); and *subjective culture* consists of the beliefs, norms, collective memories, attitudes, values, discourses and practices which group members commonly use as a frame of reference for thinking about, making sense of and relating to the world.

Culture itself is a composite formed from all three aspects – it consists of a network of material, social and subjective resources. The total set of cultural resources is distributed across the entire group, but each individual member of the group appropriates and uses only a subset of the total set of cultural resources potentially available to them. Defining culture in this way means that groups of any size may have their own distinctive cultures. This includes nations, ethnic groups, cities, neighbourhoods, work organisations, occupational groups, sexual orientation groups, disability groups, generational groups, families, etc.

For this reason, all people belong simultaneously to and identify with many different cultures. Furthermore, all cultures are dynamic and constantly change over time as a result of political, economic and historical events and developments, and as a result of interactions with and influences from other cultures. Cultures also change over time because of their members' internal contestation of the meanings, norms, values and practices of the group. If, in the process of contestation, new meanings, values or practices emerge which are sufficiently novel, and then become fashionable or attractive to other people within the group, these novel constructions may in turn contribute to the total pool of cultural resources available to group members and therefore change the culture itself in the process.

In short, all people participate in multiple cultures, and all cultures are internally variable, diverse and heterogeneous. Cultural affiliations are personalised, and people's multiple cultural affiliations interact and intersect with each other. The way people participate in their cultures is often context-dependent and fluid, and all cultures are constantly evolving and changing. Cultural affiliations not only enable but also constrain people's thoughts,

feelings and actions. Finally, people's sense of well-being and social functioning can be adversely affected if others ascribe inappropriate identities to them.

Intercultural Encounter

An intercultural encounter is an encounter with another person (or group of people) who is perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself. Such encounters may take place either face-to-face or virtually through, for example, social or communications media. They may involve people from different countries, people from different regional, linguistic, ethnic or religious backgrounds, or people who differ from each other because of their lifestyle, gender, social class, sexual orientation, age or generation, level of religious observance, etc. An interpersonal encounter becomes an intercultural encounter when cultural differences are perceived and made salient either by the situation or by the individual's own orientation and attitudes. Thus, in an intercultural interaction, one does not respond to the other person (or people) on the basis of their own individual personal characteristics – instead, one responds to them on the basis of their affiliation to another culture or set of cultures. In such situations, intercultural competence is required to achieve harmonious interaction and successful dialogue.

Intercultural competence is therefore a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one, either singly or together with others, to: – understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself; – respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people; – establish positive and constructive relationships with such people – understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural “difference”. Here, the term “respect” means that one has regard for, appreciates and values the other; the term “appropriate” means that all participants in the situation are equally satisfied that the interaction occurs within expected cultural norms; and “effective” means that all involved are able to achieve their objectives in the interaction, at least in part.

Role of schools

Schools and teachers have essential roles to play in (a) recognizing all forms of diversity and encouraging students to appreciate this diversity and work inter-culturally, (b) to protect those students who may be seen as “different” and ensure that they are not made invisible nor bullied; (c) to use inclusive and diverse curriculum and pedagogy.

Specific classroom strategies can be used for promoting intercultural understanding and practices that work against prejudice and discrimination.

- Share stories and cultural traditions and organize celebrations that reflect the diversity of the classroom.
- Create a safe and welcoming space for all learners.
- Emphasize multiple perspectives and “decentering” (through everyday events, historical phenomena, storytelling, artistic products).
- Use both dominant and non-dominant languages/text within the classroom.
- Use role plays and simulations (demonstrating different norms, beliefs and values).
- Assign ethnographic tasks and field trips to learn about people coming from different ethnic, religious or socio-economic groups.
- Invite guest speakers to tell their stories of identity and culture.
- Use film, texts and photographs to present different world views and perspectives.

All these strategies should encourage multi-perspectivity and awareness; critical thinking around identity, status and discrimination; and self-reflection on positionality.

By not recognizing diversity among learners, or de-valuing their language or culture in the curriculum and schooling system, schools “subtract” cultural resources from learners. Moreover, when socio-cultural and political constructions in the curriculum are silent on issues such as gender and sexual orientation, students are left in the hands of the hidden curriculum. Typically, the hidden curriculum stigmatizes deviance. (Flinders & Thornton, 2013.)

Multiculturalism versus Interculturalism

The terms multiculturalism and interculturalism are often treated synonymously but there are some differences. The first is geographical. Intercultural education is the term preferred in Europe, with the exception of the UK and Finland. Both multicultural and intercultural education can take many different directions, and traditional and more progressive versions of both multicultural and intercultural education can be found. The more traditional and conservative approaches focus on learning to get along and learning about different cultures. The more critical approaches focus on social justice as a core value, on furthering

democracy and working against prejudice and discrimination. The critically oriented approaches of both intercultural and multicultural education of today address the culturally diverse classroom as including the intersections of ethnicity, race, class, gender, religion, language, disability, and sexual orientation. In this broad sense we are all part of a culturally diverse society, and intercultural and multicultural education is for all students, not only for minority and immigrant students.



References

Flinders, D.J. and Thornton, S.J. (2017). *The Curriculum Studies Reader*, 5th edition. NY: Routledge. I the 5th edition is not available, please acquire the 4th edition from 2013.

Huber, J. and Reynolds, C. (eds.) (2014). *Developing Intercultural Competence Through Education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. [16808ce258 \(coe.int\)](https://www.coe.int/t/t02/education/16808ce258.aspx)

