

Psychosocial development in the concept of intercultural education¹

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Abstract

In the context of modern multicultural societies, the axes and strategies that will lead to the management of diversity in the classroom and promote intercultural education are set out. Diversity appears as a result of both individual and familial characteristics, school and sociocultural factors that can all act as risk factors for the individual and sometimes as protective factors. The promotion of pupils' psychosocial development is imperative when the display of diversity in the classroom takes the form of stressful, aggressive, degrading behaviors, learning difficulties, lack of self-image and self-confidence, even bodily disability, and aims at reducing risk factors while increasing the protective agents. At the same time, the main goals-principles of intercultural education promote student education for empathy, solidarity, intercultural respect, and education against the nationalist way of thinking. The role of teachers is important in these efforts, as their empathy, acceptance, active listening may be the one that will lead to the development of positive emotional ties with his / her pupils necessary for the smooth development of the individual. In addition, by creating clear and distinct boundaries, learning social skills, providing care and support, high expectations and clear expressions, and enabling students to participate in it, they will be able to overcome any difficulties they may experience and continue successfully. Experiential learning in the context of innovative classroom activities, including engaging, activating, debating, decision making, conflict management exercises appear to contribute effectively to the process of managing diversity and promoting resilience.

Keywords

Psychosocial development, diversity, education, resilience

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Modern multicultural societies

The term *multiculturalism* is used to describe a social reality and its evolutionary process (Palaiologou & Dietz, 2012; Spinthourakis & Katsillis, 2003). A *multicultural society* is a society in which people of different cultures, languages, religions and cultures coexist (Nikolaou, 2012a). The multicultural approach developed in recent decades due to the creation of modern multicultural societies, acknowledges, and encourages the existence of cultural heterogeneity (Arvaniti, 2015). It highlights social cohesion through diversity, supports integration into a common culture with much more flexible and democratic ways, and argues that social harmony, cohesion and integration are achieved through cultural pluralism and acceptance (Nikolaou, 2012b).

European societies, including Greece (Palaiologou, 2004), are now multicultural. They are trying to respond to the ever-increasing cultural diversity, mainly stemming from the phenomenon of migration, thus leading to a smoother coexistence of different cultures (Palaiologou, 2011). Nowadays the evolution of unicultural societies into multicultural ones is a fact (Palaiologou, & Evangelou, 2011). This creates educational needs, which intercultural education aspires to answer (Nikolaou & Spinthourakis, 2004).

Intercultural education

The terms *multicultural* and *intercultural* are not always conceptually distinct. In Council of Europe and European Union' texts the term *multicultural* describes a social reality and the term *intercultural* the cooperation between individuals who characterized by cultural diversity (Bereris, 2001). The term *interculturalism* focuses on cultivating the acceptance of diversity (OECD 2010; Spinthourakis, 2006; Spinthourakis, Karatzia-Stavlioti & Roussakis, 2009). Today the concepts of *interculturalism* and *multiculturalism* have become international terms, widely used especially in the field of education (Holm & Zilliacus, 2009; Hill, 2007). Others limit the use of the term *intercultural* to the level of education, while they use the term *multiculturalism* to describe specific social realities (Nikolaou, 2012a). In other words, *multiculturalism* is the 'given' and *interculturalism* is the 'desired'.

Intercultural education was born in response to the need to redefine the relationship between education and a multicultural society (Nikolaou, 2000). It is the bridge that allows two or more cultures to communicate. It prepares individuals for life in a multicultural society and gives opportunity to diverse cultural groups to participate actively in social development through an environment, which shares values, practices and processes (Palaiologou, & Evangelou, 2011). Intercultural education brings not only the acceptance and respect towards diversity, but also the recognition of each cultural identity

through a daily effort of dialogue, understanding and cooperation (Palaiologou & Dimitriadou, 2013).

Intercultural education involves different cultures, seeks to prevent the formation of stereotypes and prejudices against persons and cultures and attempts to transcend all forms of ethnocentrism through an educational process. This process focuses on human rights by promoting understanding and cooperation among peoples and guides societies to progress and peace (Palaiologou & Evangelou, 2013). Intercultural education aims to eliminate discrimination and exclusion, strives to take into account social and cultural particularities and does not merely teach tolerance for the diverse. It promotes the education of students with regards to empathy, solidarity, intercultural respect and the reduction of nationalistic thinking (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). It creates the spiritual background, which allows the appreciation of the 'other,' in order to create open societies, culturally harmonious, which will be distinguished by equilibrium, mutual understanding and acceptance (Nikolaou, 2012a).

Diversity in classroom

Within the school context, diversity in the classroom can take a variety of forms, such as the presence of learning difficulties, the lack of self-esteem and self-confidence and even physical illness (Dimakos & Tasiopoulou, 2003; Palaiologou, 2004). It occurs as a result of many factors, individual, family, school and socio-cultural characteristics that can all act either as risk factors for the individual or sometimes as protective ones (Motti-Stefanidi, Pavlopoulos, Obradović, Dalla, Takis, Papathanassiou & Masten, 2008).

According to Masten (2013, 2014), risk factors may refer either to a negative characteristic of the individual or to his/her family or social environment or to a traumatic experience. They are also found in the difficult conditions in which people live. Risk factors contribute to difficulties, both in the adaption of the individuals and in their mixing in situations that threaten their development.

When personal development is threatened by various risk factors, there are some other factors that may have a positive effect on it. These variables can be characterized as protective factors (Luthar, 1993). According to Luthar (2006), most of the individual protective factors come from the child's interaction with their environment. Thus, for example, when a person successfully faces various challenges, he/she gains experiences that shape expectations of self-efficacy and promote resilience. These experiences are highly dependent on the external environment in which each individual lives (Anagnostaki, Pavlopoulos, Obradović, Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2016). However, when the expectations of self-efficacy are high, the individual is able to identify the environmental opportunities and

take advantage of them in order to cope with the difficult challenges that cause stress more easily (Papakonstantinou, 2018). This can lead to a successful adaptation, which is the point for a successful life (Rutter, 2012).

In multicultural societies, the promotion of students' holistic psychosocial development appears to be critical and it aims to reduce the risk factors while increasing protective ones by offering them opportunities to explore the 'other', the 'diverse' while cultivating their own selves (Motti-Stefanidi, Pavlopoulos, Obradović & Masten, 2008). Intercultural education provides the framework not only for theoretical analyses, but also for effective teaching interventions. Certain steps are required during this process, such as (Palaiologou, 2004):

- recognition and understanding of disputes;
- respect for cultures;
- positive attitude and perception of differences in cultures, diversity, diversity;
- the emphasis on the common points of different groups;
- the interaction between different lifestyles;
- solidarity, peace and social justice;
- awareness of the strength and value of cultural diversity;
- the conscience of human rights;
- equal opportunities.

Intercultural education can work in two ways in order to succeed in the above steps (Nikolaou, 2012a). One approach can be to work with minority groups. Through intercultural education, these groups need to be strengthened by developing knowledge, such as learning the language in which the majority of the society in which they live communicate, as well as skills. That is because these groups need not only survive, but also to feel safe and expand their potential, to integrate into society, to understand the social, economic and political system of the society in which they live, to become socialized, to be recognized as equal members of society and to develop their self-esteem (Palaiologou, 2011). The other approach is to work with majority groups in order to help them overcome the negative categorizations and prejudices, reject the idea that one culture is higher (or more important) than the other, and adopt objective criteria of thinking (Nikolaou & Spinthourakis, 2004).

Teachers' role

The most appropriate place to nurture interculturalism is within our schools because it is there that diversity appears in various forms and needs to be managed within the classrooms (Nikolaou, 2000, 2012a; Spinthourakis & Katsillis, 2003). An intercultural classroom is an open classroom, where teachers and

students may come from different socio-cultural contexts, have different perspectives on (and interpretation of) reality but these difference are appropriately incorporated and enriched in the curriculum (Anagnostaki et al., 2016; Bower, Carroll & Ashman, 2012).

Teachers' role is important in these endeavors, as their own empathy, acceptance, active listening may be potential agents for the students' psychosocial development (Cushner & Mahon, 2009). Teachers have in their hands a very useful tool to promote students' psychological development: The Resiliency Wheel (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). This wheel emphasizes in the importance of reducing the risk factors while increasing the protective ones.

Henderson & Milstein (2003) have described six fundamental factors that can contribute to the promotion of resilience within the school environment and that make up the Resiliency Wheel (Figure 1). These factors are: a) the development of positive emotional ties, b) the creation of clear and distinct boundaries, c) the learning of social skills, d) the provision of care and support, e) the presence of high expectations and clear expressions and f) the active student participation. The first three are aimed at reducing risk factors, while the last three are aimed at enhancing protective factors that promote resilience in the school environment. Through the Resilience Wheel teachers have the opportunity to design, develop and implement specific actions that promote the psychosocial development of their students at the school level by enhancing protective factors and reducing the risk ones (Esquivel, Doll & Oades-Sese, 2011).



Figure 1. The Resiliency Wheel (Henderson & Milstein, 2003)

Therefore, a school is transformed into a 'resilience community' that provides support and guidance to all children and helps them to facilitate their development and adjustment (Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou & Dimitropoulou, 2010; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Within this 'caring' school

community, resilient children are identified by their optimism, creativity, ability to take action and to set and execute goals (Doll, Jones, Osborn, Dooley & Turner, 2011).

Experiential learning

The way in which all of the above can be most effective for students is mainly the experiential way. Experiential learning refers to the process of acquiring knowledge through experience and the search for personal meaning in it. This process promotes the personal development of learners as well as their awareness of social problems and human relations issues. In any case, experiential learning can be understood as “a journey of discovering the meaning of human existence and the nature of the common good” (Deloudi, 2002:148).

The theory of experiential learning emphasizes the important role experience plays in the learning process and highlights the links between school class, students’ daily life and social reality. Experiential learning is an appropriate method for answering the need to holistically develop an individual’s personality. The pedagogy of experiential learning aims at shaping the right environment wherein children can acquire experiences that facilitate the shaping of the children’s personality, desires, needs, motivation, and interests (Bakirtzis, 2000).

Experiential learning is an alternative educational way that could be extended beyond desks, textbooks or face-to-face teaching. It stands in contrast to traditional teaching methods because this is the kind of learning in which the educator is directly involved in the contemplated reality (Trillira & Anagnostopoulou, 2008). That is, students are given opportunities to experience the issue they are investigating.

The main principles of experiential learning could be summarized as follows (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001):

- emphasizes experience,
- suggests the search for meaning of things,
- seeks the student’s mental and emotional activation,
- includes engaging, activating, debating, decision making, conflict management exercises in the context of innovative classroom activities,
- appears to contribute effectively to the process of managing diversity
- promotes resilience

Experiential learning holds promise for the effective psychosocial development of the ‘resilient child’ through intercultural education. This form of learning is a dynamic process. It ties into the enhancement of children’s rights, values and identity incorporating new, positive as well as negative experiences from the child’s daily life (Theron & Donald, 2012).

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