

## **Ethics education in Polish schools – a multicultural approach with a global view**

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**ABSTRACT.** The aim of this paper is to highlight one of the issues which insufficiently deals with the relationship between globalization, migration and multicultural education: teaching values. To engage this matter, I will mobilize critical theory, specifically that of Martha Nussbaum and James Banks, to discuss the concepts of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. In doing so, I will argue that even though Nussbaum and Banks' theories do have some constraints, they are to a large degree applicable and possible to relate to the ethical challenges of multicultural education. The theories are plausible in some aspects because they present reasonable arguments for the necessity of educational reform in an interconnected world, and because they make educational proposals of instrumental value for teachers. I will consider first some theoretical debates on multicultural education, especially in relation to teaching and learning that is based on democratic values, affirming world citizenship in an interdependent world. Then, I discuss ethics education in Poland by introducing policies, measures, approaches, curriculum and organization.

*Keywords:* ethics education, core curriculum, Poland, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism.

Ethics education in schools is a challenge and an opportunity for young people to develop good moral conduct while preparing them to make appropriate ethical decisions. When talking about education, it is impossible to avoid a moral enterprise. In particular, the question of how to promote morality in schools is an on-going topic for discussions among practitioners and researchers. Cultural relativism assumes that ethical decisions, behaviours, and beliefs are relative to the individual within his or her own culture, and any choice of the individual must be evaluated, taking in account the specific culture. Based on the fact that the world is going through a process of globalization and migration, the daily praxis of teaching has to overcome the new challenges facing teaching in modern society.

The methodological approach in this paper is the desk review mapping cosmopolitan education and multicultural education. I reviewed two types of literature: academic studies and the Polish ethics core curricula. In addition, I obtained information and resources on ethics education in Poland through direct contact with professionals working in the field, in particular with teachers and teacher trainers.

### **Cosmopolitan connections in multicultural world**

Over the past 40 years, numerous scholars, researchers and organizations have been defining multicultural education in different ways for various reasons. Even now there is still no agreement upon a definition emerging from the literature on multicultural education (Ogbu, 1992; Ozturgut, 2011).

The term *multicultural education* is used often in two contexts: teaching *in* a multicultural society and teaching *about* cultural diversity. Initially the term was created in liberation struggles, and at first it meant teaching culturally different children to help them succeed in mainstream education. In this framework, multiculturalism is understood as a mosaic of cultures co-inhabiting an area in the context of a single dominant culture (Nordström 2008, p.134). Consequently, at its simplest level, multicultural education is a celebration of cultural diversity (Saul & Saul 2001).

The broader definition of multicultural education at present encompasses a holistic perspective, emphasising value clarification and democratic principles such as equity and social justice (Nieto 2000; Schugurensky 2002). Multicultural education aims to help people with different backgrounds to communicate and work together better. It tries to make it 'possible for children from diverse cultures to transcend their cultural borders and connect with people who differ from them in significant ways' (Sleeter & Grant, 1988).

The understanding of multiculturalism goes beyond ethnicity and includes a wide range of social groups that have been excluded or discriminated against in societies, such as women and disabled people (e.g. Banks, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Giving the global context of my paper, I choose the definition by James A. Banks (2010, p.7) that defines the term multicultural education to be 'a wide variety of programs and practices related to educational equity, women, ethnic groups, language minorities, low-income groups, and people with disabilities'. The key goal of multicultural education is for Banks (2009) the creation of effective citizens for a diverse society, resulting in better decision-making and social action skills for students that lead to a more democratic and humane world. There are five dimensions of multicultural education for Banks: (1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) an equity pedagogy, and (5) an empowering school culture and social structure. The major goal of multicultural education is, for Banks, to reform educational systems on all levels so that students from diverse ethnic, racial and social-class groups will experience educational equality (Banks, 2006). That understanding of multicultural education emphasises equal opportunity for all to learn and thus succeed in society. This can be achieved by facilitating empowerment and active citizenship.

American philosopher and ethicist Martha Nussbaum believes in the benefits of a multicultural education. However she has her own view on multiculturalism. She distinguishes multicultural education from 'cosmopolitan' education, which follows a 'former new anti-humanist view, one that celebrates difference in an uncritical way and denies the very possibility of common interests and understandings, even of dialogue or debate, that take one outside one's own group.' (Nussbaum, 1997, p.110) Her education program involves mainly identifying particular differences and behavioural anomalies between cultures and ethnicities. Cosmopolitanism looks for perceived differences in discursive manner, while multicultural education seeks an alternative cultural instruction; it 'portrays the world as a marketplace of competing ideas' (Nussbaum, 1997, p.109). 'Value and behavioural differences are viewed as something to be affirmed and accepted rather than critically analyzed, understood and potentially challenged' (Nussbaum, 1997, p.110).

Nussbaum's understanding of cosmopolitanism is connected with the idea of education for world citizenship that must 'prepare to live together in a pluralistic democracy' (Nussbaum, 1997:119). The idea of world citizenship requires bringing up topics such as ethnic or social minorities and discussions about major cultural and religious orientations. World citizens will find out more about local community and the history or culture of their own region because this is where they live together with others.

An important part of Nussbaum's world citizenship education proposal is the 'narrative imagination'. This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the situation of a person different from oneself, to understand the emotions of others. That kind of ability requires use of the imagination, which can be cultivated within courses in literature and the arts where students are prepared to understand the situation of people different from themselves (Nussbaum, 1997).

Multicultural education focuses on celebrating the differences, while cosmopolitanism aims to understand differences in order to find out similarities, and bridge together the whole of humanity. Nussbaum's cosmopolitanism doesn't have a purely instrumentalist sense as a means of seeking politico-economic ends, as a deliberative rational mechanism through which differences are understood, similarities identified and

conflict ultimately reduced (Naseem, Hyslop-Margison, 2006, p.56). Nussbaum strongly believes that such cosmopolitanism has the potential to identify common values that bridge cultures without negating local culture. 'Instead of undermining local identities, the larger human moral and rational community provides the concentric circle that embraces all of humanity' (Naseem, Hyslop-Margison, 2006:53). Multiculturalism and its identity politics 'sometimes has led to a new anti-humanist view that celebrates difference in an uncritical way and that denies the very possibility of common interests and understandings that take one outside one's own group' (Nussbaum, 1997,110).

For Noddings (2005) the relationship between multicultural education and global citizenship lies in establishing formerly neglected groups as full citizens – people who are heard and recognized. 'The same purpose should guide our commitment to global citizenship' (Noddings, 2005, 16). The multicultural curricula should be closely tied to developing global citizens because pupils should be taught to 'value the lives of all people, not just those of our own nation' (Noddings, 2005, 17). A culturally integrated global society requires that multicultural and global education integrate learning about how to live together with others and teaching about how to address issues of diversity beyond the boundaries of the nation-state (Gaudelli, 2003).

Multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism education are two different concepts. Multiculturalism is based on preserving inherent differences. It shows the world as a marketplace of competing ideas. Value and behavioural differences are viewed as something to be affirmed and accepted. It assumes responsible and active actions in diverse societies, resulting in better decision-making and social action skills, leading to a more democratic and humane world. Cosmopolitanism instead supports respect and enjoyment of cultural differences with a sense of global belonging. At the same time it has the potential to identify common values that bridge cultures without negating local values. Disregarding nationality, culture, ethnicity or religion, cosmopolitanism postulates that ethical values and principles are universally relevant to all human beings. Referring to M. Nussbaum, my understanding of cosmopolitanism is based on the idea of shared humanity that refers to the need to bring up principles that are required, justified and accepted to guide human interactions.

Cosmopolitanism is relevant for a strong society. It expresses the appearance of a leading group that can tolerate the presence of other groups, such as newcomers. It explores processes of awareness and adaptation in a rapidly changing global world as well as the means for building global community by bonding people together with shared memories, unity, and fate. Cosmopolitanism is an ongoing attempt to get knowledge about behaviours and needs beyond one's own culture. It requires both empathy and imagination. Moreover, it holds that each individual has universal and equal worth and dignity because they are members of the human species and not because they belong to any particular religion, tribe or state. The similarity of all individuals provides the basis for international standards, laws and norms applicable to everyone in every culture.

However, at the same time those terms go together and do not exclude each other. Both tend to encourage children to see others in term of their common humanity rather than their cultural differences. Multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism offer ways of thinking beyond the opposition between local and global. Both the cosmopolitan and multicultural might agree on the importance of not idealizing a life of movement and migration, such as that experienced by many asylum seekers, refugees, and guest workers. For them, it is a forced choice that is far away from abstract philosophical universalism. Whether chosen nor imposed, cosmopolitanism is about being fully at home nowhere and to be more or less at home anywhere.

## **Core curricula in Poland – an overview**

To start describing ethics education in Polish schools, first I will present an overview of the Polish core curricula and the status of ethics education in Poland.

Preparing the core curricula and framework timetables for pre-primary, general and vocational education in Poland is the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education. Schools have autonomy and independently decide on the contents and scope of teaching. Methods for the implementation of core

curricula are taken jointly, by a collective body of teachers, after consultations with parents, taking into account schools' conditions and pupils' needs.

The core curriculum in Poland defines common foundations and ensures the uniformity of the education system. The teaching programme describes all stages of general education, aims and content to be taught to pupils, and ways of achieving these objectives with assessment procedures. The framework document leaves space for teachers to develop more detailed school programmes, and to make free decision about textbooks, forms and methods of teaching. While the core curriculum does define aims, content and tasks for the school, there are no references to the ways of in which they should be achieved. Ethics classes are arranged in schools in Poland for everyone, though it is not compulsory but voluntary for pupils to attend. They may attend religion lessons, ethics, or both. They have the right not to attend either religious or ethics studies. Results in ethics are not included in the student's grade point average.

Ethics education, together with religion education as a school subject, is a rather recent innovation: it has been incorporated in Polish schools since 1991. Societal changes resulting from the socio-political transition from a socialist system to democracy determined the birth of a new system and the beginning of the changes. From this moment, Polish society entered several transformations. One of them applied to moral values, where new possibilities and rights were created for the citizens of a democratic system.

### **Ethics in the Polish core curricula – interlocking multicultural & cosmopolitan approaches. How it is and how it could be.**

Despite the tension between multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, ethics as a school subject in Poland shows potential as a subject which offers the opportunity in schools to interlock multicultural and global approaches. Those pupils who attend ethics classes have several opportunities to develop understanding for common values that bridge together without negating local. Such opportunity arises with content *'recognizing of fundamental values', 'perception of the diversity of attitudes and behaviors'*. In addition, there are some references in the core curriculum that emphasize common values for all people such as work, natural environment, democracy, and friendship.

Understanding the differences and similarities in common values can be developed in ethics classes by development of the *'imagination'* as M. Nussbaum calls it. The *'imagination'* is used to help understand people who are different from oneself, to understand their emotions, wishes and desires, and to encourage empathy. The content of the Polish core curriculum refers to *'assessment of someone else's behavior, for example main characters from books', 'understanding the impact of one's own decisions on the others', 'perception of the diversity of attitudes and behaviors', 'taking responsibility for themselves and others'*. Pupils are taught to know and respect common rights and problems of various groups, such as those from marginalized backgrounds (e.g. by storytelling in primary school). Another issue that refers to living together with others in an interlocking world is the promotion of knowledge about different customs, beliefs, as well as the awareness about the *'need for nature protection as a common concern of humankind'*. In primary school children learn about the need to provide assistance to people in need in everyday life. Living in multicultural societies requires openness and understanding for differences and similarities, but also important are skills and competences regarding how to live together with others who are different and not always similar. In this regard the Polish curriculum emphasises *'identifying the specific norms and values in school, community and democratic country' and knowledge about 'standards and democratic values within society'*.

Another issue noticeable in both the primary and secondary level core curriculum is nature and its protection as a task and moral commitment for all human beings. In primary school pupils develop an *'understanding of the need to protect nature'*, whereas in secondary schools there is more emphasis on the *'moral dimension in relation to humans and the natural environment'*. The primary school curriculum is particularly focused on issues such as *'local environment, community, school'*. In secondary school there is more content regarding world issues. Gaining a local and global perspective, pupils develop the ability to see themselves as members (citizens) of some local groups but also that those groups are part of bigger group – the group of human beings.

A local and global perspective of teaching content includes the *'development of moral and social responsibility'*. The ethics core curriculum for primary school refers to knowledge that *'pupils can't act at the costs of others'* and awareness of *'how important truthfulness is'*, as well as skills focusing on *'assessment of negative results of falsehood and slanders'*, *'knowledge of the need to offer assistance to people in need'*, *'recognizing of responsibilities towards family and school'*, *'recognition of fundamental values, including their proper hierarchy'*, *'justifying opinions, passing judgments in relation to social phenomena at the level of small groups, communities, school and local community'*. Also, pupils gain the opportunity to find out the meaning of social responsibility and social norms in relation to family and other people (school colleagues, friends, elder people).

Another topic referred to in the Polish curriculum regarding multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism is the relationship between the human being and morality. The curriculum content includes, for example, such topics as *'Man and values'*, *'The moral dimension of human life'*, *'Moral and manipulation'*, *'Developing of own opinions about man and his moral dilemmas'* in various life situations, including the views of main religions, such as it is described in the core curriculum *'Christianity'*.

Although in the Polish ethics core curricula there are several examples of how to approach multicultural and cosmopolitan education in the teaching content, several opportunities certainly exist for creating new dimensions of ethics education in Poland.

It can be questioned what multicultural education should focus on primarily. I think in the case of moral education it should not focus on culture as much as on *learning how to cooperate peacefully between, within and among ourselves*: neither on visible nor on hidden differences, but on finding out new images about situations involving responsibility and assistance. In my understanding of ethics education with a cosmopolitan view, this issue definitely needs to appear within lessons such as activities involving cooperation, sharing tasks and responsibilities, providing mutual support in order to achieve common intentions. After achieving the aim, it is not necessary to think about the ethnic or other differences among pupils, as there will be only joy from the award of joint success.

An important part of *learning how to live together in a pluralistic society* is nurturing the civic virtues and values that are part of it. The teaching content might cover such topics as responsibility for protecting another's rights, helping to extend skills to debate differences in a civil manner. In addition to debating, pupils need to be aware that a common point of view can not always be found through discussion. If disagreement refers to moral and civic issues, then students need to learn about the alternatives, such as learning to think in informed and reflective ways about important, but controversial, moral issues.

An essential role of moral educators is to teach that disagreements among people can run deep. One way of overcoming aversions to each other is by *learning how to debate about identity and multiculturalism*. Pupils should understand that disagreement is common about the justice and goodness of different cultures, about how to make sense of the world, and about different worldviews among human beings. Ethics education with a multicultural approach and global view will start up a discussion among young people about the major ways civilization has thought out talking about the human condition and morality.

Ethics education with a global and multicultural view requires including the development of basic cultural literacy in the school curriculum. Studying history and literature will expand the understanding of human condition. The study of history via literature - as a record of moral, social or political experiments - gives pupils imaginative insights how people have thought and felt about the world in different times and places. It is important to focus, within moral education, on *learning how it is in the situation of a person different from oneself*, encouraging empathy by using imagination.

## Conclusions

This paper was intended to extend the understanding of the challenges of multicultural & cosmopolitan education. The contribution is twofold. First, it demonstrates that ethics education can not be understood as part of multicultural or global education, as they are two different concepts. The second contribution

is that the content of the Polish ethics curriculum includes both multicultural and global issues. But there are still a lot of possibilities of what could be included in teaching content. Generally formulated, the Polish core curricula with the idea of leaving schools/teachers the decision about the scope and ways in which each objective can be achieved is a great opportunity to choose methods and detailed topics to be discussed with pupils. There is an essential role of the teacher in supporting pupils in thinking about the consequences of their behaviour on themselves and on others and how others feel. A challenge of moral education in a multicultural global world is the focus on fostering the development of empathy and pro-social emotions. An attempt to teach how to live together is at the heart of most formulations of moral education in a multicultural and global world. Although there are differences between multicultural and cosmopolitan education, ethics education might be an opportunity for Polish schools to combine these two issues by including the development of moral values important in a global and multicultural world in the core curriculum. In doing so, focus should be put on teaching content. An essential element of ethics education in a global and multicultural world is the promotion of intercultural dialogue, social cohesion and the valuing of diversity and equality. Therefore it is important to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help to reduce conflict, increase appreciation and understanding of similarities and differences between religious, ethnic, and social groups, and build mutual respect among human beings.

It might well be claimed that one of the ideas of moral education in multicultural world is the aim of trying to help pupils to explore the importance of thinking about moral issues, moral dilemmas and the complexities of life and relationships with others. I believe that it is more effective to lead young people towards moral maturity than to enforce certain views of human goodness and certain patterns of behaviour.

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