

## **Education at the Junction of Cultures**

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## Foreword

We are pleased to present the publication “Education at the Junction of Cultures”, which comprises 7 papers from 5 different countries – Poland, Lithuania, Russia, the USA and Japan. The goal of this publication is to show and discuss education in situations, where two or more “cultures” meet each other. By culture in the aspect of education we understand not only students' cultural capital, but also rules of educational institutions and the influence of the dominant culture.

In the call for papers for this publication we asked both for articles concerning relations between ethnic groups in education, approaches to multiculturalism, interculturalism or assimilation of cultures, and education in cultures where the old meets the new.

Intercultural education, the main research area of this work is not a new concept in educational studies. However, the domination of the discourse focused on multiculturalism, ethnicity and problems with immigrants' integration is criticised (Žižek, 2007; Bourdieu, 2001) as being a substitute for real problems, such as burdening democratic societies with costs of training employees for corporations. The notion of social change, previously regarded as one of the essential functions of education, is gradually being replaced by the socialisation to the capricious needs of the market economy.

We do not ignore the perspective, that education nowadays might only be a preparation to the precarity of the labour market and that conflicts of interests are too often reduced to cultural problems. However, it would be hard to ignore the increasing migration all over the world. Living in the “age of migration” (Castles and Miller, 2003), we face significant demographic changes in our societies. Educational institutions handle with more and more students with different cultural backgrounds and our assumption is, that there is a need of coexisting peacefully at school and in the society with respect to each other's rights. Thus, talking about culture is not a political manipulation, it is the daily and widely experienced cultural shock - caused both by meeting the others and coming back to the previously known culture - that makes it more difficult to see other social strata.

The cultural change happening in the societies is broad, including diffusion of cultures, transculturation and culture loss. The changes are not only caused by migration, they occur even within one culture, especially when the local meets the global. Globalization is often counteracted by concentrating on the local, hence tendencies in education to focus on place, such as critical pedagogy of place (Gruenwald, 2003). Also other changes influence culture and, subsequently, education – for example changes of political order. All those aspects are linked with each other, they often happen at the same time. Our publication aims at showing the change in culture from those different, but sometimes inseparable perspectives.

Another level of learning at the junction of cultures is this publication itself. We were trying to look at the changes happening in different parts of the world. The papers that we managed to gather present research on such remote places from each other as Iran, Greenland and the USA. However, the intercultural education occurs here not only because of the background of the authors, but also because of the research questions. The assumption underlying some of the papers presented here is, that we can compare systems of education and learn from this comparison. Looking at the Swedish educational system, Elkhan Ismailov tried to draw conclusions for Russia; Magdalena Prusinowska attempted to warn Poles not to follow the example of Iran in treating the minorities, while Jill Rachele Stucker wanted to set an example for the USA, drawing on the Canadian example. This intercultural learning was one of the goals of this publication – the editors believe, that by showing other cultures' practices and reflecting on their effects, we can come a little bit closer to answering the question of how to deal with cultural differences in the field of education.

This publication was only possible due to the Internet – first of all, because it was used to collect and present the papers, but also as it enabled at least two of the authors – Magdalena Prusinowska and Małgorzata Zielińska – to conduct their research. Analysing on-line documents and discussions (e.g. fora) is quite a new method of research, possible thanks to modern technologies and the relative transparency of the research subjects. Consequently, research is possible even without traveling and financial support. The condition of the independent researcher was one of the issues discussed in the papers. On the one hand while analysing data on the Internet, the researcher is dependent on the materials that are “within click”, but on the other hand, if the research is to be conducted in the place being scrutinized, it will be dependent on sufficient financial and organisational support, as it was in Elkhan Ismailov's case.

The editors are Poles, but we did not focus on the changes happening here, not because it was not interesting to us. Contrary to this, we believe that looking at other countries and learning from their perspective can be a way to reinhabit (Gruenwald, 2003) our place, which also undergoes serious changes. We are aware of the Levi-Strauss' (1970) suggestion that the interest in other cultures can result from a hidden presumption that something is wrong with our own one. This may be supported by the fact that almost twenty years after Poland's turning into capitalism, one of the key categories used in describing our reality is postcommunism.

In the papers presented here, the authors look at education mostly from the macro perspective, aiming at showing a vital part of a country's system of education. The exception is *Escape to trivial tourism*, where an educational institution is analysed from its student's perspective.

We have divided the papers into three chapters. The division is sometimes vague and some works may well contribute to other areas.

The first chapter, called *Learning from the others* comprises two papers - *Evolution of Language of Instruction Policy in Canada*, by Jill Rachele Stucker and *Adult Education in Sweden and Russia*, by Elkhan Ismailov. The former work discusses the tolerant language policy in Canadian schools and it contrasts it to the “English-only” policy in the United States. The latter compares teaching of modern languages in Russian and Swedish pre-university educational institutions.

Chapter 2, *Cultural diversity in schools*, consists of three articles. In the first one, *The Education of Minorities in Iran*, Magdalena Prusinowska shows the gap between regulations concerning minorities' rights in Iranian education and the everyday practice. The next paper, *The Effects of Multiculturalism within the Parameters of Instructional Course Design* by David Blunt discusses the need of reflecting cultural changes in teacher training in the USA. The third and final part of this chapter is *Escape to trivial tourism* written by Piotr Kowzan, in which he presents a pedagogical analysis of the activities and goals of the folk high schools and the intercultural learning that occurs on several levels of the schools' daily activities.

The last part of this publication is called *Local and global factors affecting education*. It starts with Małgorzata Zielińska's work, *Critical Pedagogy of Place and the case of Education in Greenland*, showing educational challenges on the island, where Danish, indigenous and global cultures meet each other. The final paper, *Citizenship and Adult Education as Prerequisite for Civic Society*, by Vaiva Zuzevičiūtė, Margarita Teresevičienė and Ligija Kaminskienė, is based on the case of the rapidly changing Lithuanian society, and - thus - the changes in the goals of education. The paper shows also adult education as means of integration with other cultures.

It is our hope, that this publication will be a contribution to discussions about the condition and future of education at the junction of cultures and that the conclusions drawn here will be of value to other researchers and decision makers.

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