

Symposium Proposal PESA 2012

Symposium: Cosmopolitanism, Interculturalism, Education and Dialogue – educating for hope in a troubled world

Abstract

Intercultural education, dialogue and understanding are key themes of international cooperation, managing diversity and peace education. ‘Interculturalism’ has recently been adopted by the Council of Europe, UNESCO and United Nations as the dominant paradigm in “cultural policy” to manage cultural diversity and encourage human rights education. Interculturalism and cosmopolitanism are related notions that address a “dialogue of civilizations”, providing both the theoretical and practical means for analyzing contemporary educational policies and practices in plural societies. We review associated concepts of dialogue, ethnocentrism, cultural relativism and universalism, arguing that strategically, ethically and practically interculturalism, education and dialogue provide the best tools for addressing interstate and ethnic diversity, with differing values and educational practices.

Our aim is to analyze the discourses of interculturalism and cosmopolitanism in education and how these are formulated in practice as means for promoting dialogue in multicultural societies in a globalized world. The symposium aims to address the main theories, issues and conflicts associated with these discourses and the way in which these have been adopted by world policy agencies for managing cultural diversity and how these have been applied in education.

The symposium begins with theory, using philosophical analysis to discuss and highlight issues associated with the key concepts of interculturalism and cosmopolitanism as the main frameworks for intercultural education and dialogue. It then moves beyond theory to practical applications including teacher education associated with contemporary contexts under globalization, the knowledge economy. The papers are provided by four international presenters (Sweden & New Zealand).

Structure – 4 papers:

1: Western Models of Intercultural Philosophy

Michael A. Peters, Waikato University, NZ

2: Intercultural Education and the Problem of Ethnocentrism

Tina Besley, Waikato University, NZ

Western Models of Intercultural Philosophy

Abstract

Starting from a theoretical position, this paper provides a genealogy of intercultural philosophy as dialogue and charts the different forms of dialogue that scholars have developed and applied. It focuses on the notion of interculturalism examining the main forms of intercultural philosophy as it has recently emerged as a reaction against and response to

Eurocentrism and the moral universalism of liberalism. The paper focuses on what is called *intercultural philosophy* in reference to the extant literature; second, it explores the “politics of difference” inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche and developed by various poststructuralist accounts of semiotic analyses of “culture” and “self”; and finally, it comments upon Richard Rorty’s pragmatist notion of “cultural politics of conversation” as a basis for philosophy and cultural studies of education.

Intercultural Education and the Problem of Ethnocentrism

Abstract

This paper provides the background and analysis of interculturalism as an emergent discourse, reviewing ethnocentrism and associated concepts, cultural relativism and universalism. It argues that strategically, ethical and practically ethnocentrism is the major presumption and problematic of interculturalism, intercultural understanding and education. Many societies marginalize and exclude specific groups based on notions of ethnocentrism and thus force them into poverty. Hence forms of dialogue in education are needed to address this.

Starting with the Greek derivation of ‘ethno’ referring to a people, nation or cultural group, most sociological texts explain that ethnocentrism is a cultural universal which is functional in maintaining the social and political order. The universality of ethnocentrism is a claim that speaks to the fact that we cannot easily shed our cultural assumptions, climb out of our culture and language in some privileged position to view things as they really are. It also fits with philosophical thinking that emphasizes, after Wittgenstein, that ‘the limits of my world are the limits of my language’. Wittgenstein argues that the mind is social or cultural and always already embedded in the external world. We are born into language and culture and we learn ‘language games’ practically. I argue that there is a strategic, ethical and practical imperative for attempting to understand other cultures especially in an age of increasing globalization where communication technologies have enhanced the prospect and the means of intercultural exchange and understanding largely unmediated by states. I argue that the emphasis should fall on identifying, analyzing and combating all forms of ethnocentrism as obstacles to intercultural understanding, rather than technical and complex philosophical arguments about the states of various forms of relativism. Arguably, this is the *major presumption* of intercultural understanding and education. While questioning the Western history of forms of dialogue, at present it is the prospect of educating about forms of dialogue that provide hope in our globalized multi-cultural world.