



CROSSROADS ON THE WAY TOWARDS EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: INTERCULTURAL, CRITICAL AND FEMINIST PEDAGOGY

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Abstract: Regardless the ideology one would embrace in thinking or rethinking education, he/she would agree that education is a real vehicle of change-making. The present article attempts to summarize through a review of multidisciplinary literature three convergent ideological trends in contemporary educational theory, which underline this powerful principle: intercultural, feminist and critical pedagogy. Although choices of concepts, suggested educational approaches or classroom strategies may seem to illustrate different view points, there are common standings shared by theorists of the respective fields: education is primarily a tool of changing society through empowerment, respecting diversity of personal experiences, building community, privileging individual voices etc. Intercultural, feminist and critical pedagogy challenge in specific ways traditional pedagogical notions, but they may be conceived as roads to the inclusive movement in education. As a consequence, boundaries of inclusive education go beyond the simple adjustment of school provisions to the special needs of the disabled, becoming a rather largely shared educational ideology, covering all educational approaches addressing specific target groups.

Key words: social inclusion, educational inclusion, intercultural pedagogy, critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy

1. Introduction

Although the words *social* and *inclusion* have been united in the widely used collocation *social inclusion*, there is little agreement on pertinent definitions and conceptual meanings. Social inclusion is mainly used in public and policy discourses and papers, and therefore little consensus has been reached on establishing its borders. In most of the European countries, social inclusion is perceived and presented as an overarching framework for addressing very diverse social policy issues, including *income inequality, skill levels, education, health inequities, housing affordability, and work-life balance*. Framework laws and programs of the European Union deal with specific measures of improving or enhancing social inclusion. However, precise understandings of the concept are far from determinate, and definitions are mainly country-specific. The common core of social inclusion involves including everyone in social institutions and relations in ways that matter for well-being. A report issued by European Commission in 2004 defines social inclusion as “a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision-making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights (as defined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union)” (European Commission, 2004). Social inclusion is oftently approached in relation with the opposite term of *social exclusion*, which may seem easier to define, but also generates lots of confusion and debates. A largely accepted (and cited) definition of social exclusion is the one proposed by J. Estivil (2003, p. 19): “Social exclusion may therefore be understood as an accumulation of confluent processes with successive ruptures arising from the heart of the economy, politics and society, which gradually distances and places

persons, groups, communities and territories in a position of inferiority in relation to centres of power, resources and prevailing values.” This meaning of the term touches all dimensions of exclusion – economical, political and social, emphasizing that *the poor* and *the new poor* are equally marginalized, and ultimately excluded in current societies. Ethnic minorities, migrants (including circular migrants), disabled persons, women, elderly, members of families and communities with low socio-economic level are seriously affected by social exclusion. In other words, social exclusion does not only mean insufficient income, and it goes beyond participation in working life; it is manifest in fields such as housing, education, health and access to services. It affects not only individuals who suffered serious set-backs, but entire social groups, which are subject to discrimination, segregation or which suffer a weakening of the traditional forms of social relations. The causes of exclusion are multiple, among which European institutions stress the following (European Commission, 1993): persistent unemployment and especially long-term unemployment; the impact of industrial change on poorly skilled workers, the evolution of family structures and the decline of traditional forms of solidarity, the growth of individualism and the decline of traditional representative institutions, and new forms of migration.

A third concept within a conceptual triangle is *social cohesion*, and it may be defined as “the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarization” (Council of Europe, 2004), and creating solidarity within a society should eventually lead to minimized exclusion.

As presented above, the three concepts seem to integrate certain view on sets of policies, and may be seen as embraced only by policy-makers. Although this is also true, social inclusion, social exclusion and social cohesion transcended the borders of the policy discourse and specific mirrorings – concepts and theoretical lines – have been developed within social and educational theory. Educational inclusion and exclusion are currently approached by specific means by policy-makers, researchers and practitioners, to explain complex school and classroom realities and to provide frameworks for addressing a diversity of students’ needs.

Traditionally, educational inclusion is understood in the Romanian context, as a set of practices leading to adjustments needed by disabled students (or special needs students). The definitions of broader concepts framing educational inclusion included in this article is justified by this narrow view, and allows placing inclusive education above the restrictive borders of special education. Accordingly, educational inclusion is approached as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 13). Thus, the inclusive movement in education should equally emphasize the need of appropriate provisions for any disadvantaged student or group of students, as discussed in the scientific literature. This is the line of reasoning behind the present review of intercultural, critical and feminist pedagogy, as theoretical standings with practical educational implications for promoting inclusion in education. None of the three ideologies has been explicitly developed or linked with the inclusive movement, but we argue that a new comprehensive framework for all these educational dimensions may be currently emerging, under the concept of educational inclusion or inclusive education.

Intercultural, critical and feminist pedagogy have been chosen for review unaccidentally: while intercultural pedagogy is systematically debated in Romanian educational literature, and benefited of extended attention, research and didactic applications (e.g. Cucos, 2000; Butnaru, 2009), critical and feminist pedagogy are rarely at the center of theoretical discourses or discussions on implications at school and classroom level. Critical and feminist pedagogy are barely approached in the Romanian scientific debate, regardless the link with the inclusive movement in education. We do not search the reasons behind the little attention oriented towards critical and feminist pedagogy, and therefore no explanations will be assumed. Along with intercultural pedagogy, critical and feminist pedagogy will be outlined within the framework of educational inclusion. Given the differences in the educational public’s knowledge on the three ideologies discussed in this paper, intercultural education and pedagogy will be approached more generally, by clarifying associated or concurrent concepts, while critical and feminist pedagogy will be reviewed with their central notions and principles. We state

again that connections between the main concepts discussed are not always explicitly mentioned by key authors in the respective fields; crossroads, as we call them, are rather implied based on theoretical view points expressed in relation with intercultural, critical and feminist pedagogy, and on educational practices suggested. As general and introductory statement, whatever disadvantaged group one would be interested in – either cultural minorities and migrants, or members of families with low socioeconomic level and coming from low power social class, or groups affected by gender discrimination – it can be agreed that theories and practices regarding needs and provisions addressing them, can be incorporated in the comprehensive framework of educational and social inclusion. Undoubtedly, educational and social inclusion constitutes the ultimate goals in assisting disadvantaged social groups.

2. Intercultural pedagogy: cultural diversity into the school

Both the concepts of *intercultural education* and of *intercultural pedagogy* are closely related to the educational systems, but they can be conceived rather as an educational principle than a subject-matter to be introduced in schools. They can be regarded as a positive reconceptualization of the so-called *pedagogy for foreigners* (Faas, 2008), which dominated legal acts and practical approaches addressing migrants in the Western European schools of the 1960s and 1970s. However, intercultural education is dominated by concurrent concepts as *multiculturalism/multicultural*, *interculturalism/intercultural*, *crossculturalism/crosscultural*. Additionally, new related ways of conceptualizing the need of educating for diversity emerged during the last two decades, as *pluralistic education*, *international or global education*.

Multiculturalism is a complex, but versatile term, as culture in itself can include almost any aspect of life. Cultural subgroups, such as ethnicity, social class, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation and place of residence are greatly emphasized within the multicultural approach. The terms become more problematic when one realizes that the same country can be socially and religiously very multicultural (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998); if we add the complexity of current migration phenomena, conceiving multicultural education as acquiring knowledge and competence for establishing good social relationships with representative of all cultural subgroups they may contact may seem just unrealistic. Different aspects of culture can be significant to various people and to the same person at different times. Persons who have been exposed to several ethnic groups might have constructed a multifaceted identity. Besides, cultures are not static and people's identities are constructed through a continuous and dynamic dialogue with others (Werbner & Modood, 1997).

In education, the word *multicultural* has been almost entirely replaced by *intercultural or pluralistic education*. The supporters of the term *intercultural education* emphasize that it is not enough to recognize different cultures, but members of the groups should also learn from mutual contact and dialogue. Intercultural education acknowledges that a genuine understanding of cultural differences and similarities is necessary for collaborating with others, and, moreover, that a pluralistic society can be an opportunity for both majority and minority groups (Cushner, 1998). Those who prefer the term *pluralistic education* want to emphasize the wide scope of the term, so that it includes various subcultures but also other dimensions of diversity, such as special needs. And thus, intercultural education is placed in close relation with inclusiveness and inclusive education.

A distinction can also be made between *international and intercultural*; *international* could refer to relations between states and intercultural to cultural relations between and inside states. *Global education* has been used as an alternative term for international education, but it can also be a deliberate choice in order to better indicate the responsibility for the common globe and the skills required in the globalized world. Haywood (2007) argues that the word *international*, with its literal meaning referring to interaction between nations, may not be adequate to describe what many educators really intend when using it as an adjective in the educational context, implying a combination of communication skills, intercultural understanding, global awareness, ecological concerns, and responsibilities involved with national, European and global citizenship. Compared to international education, global education may be a more relevant term in the present; besides national states, there are other influential actors on the global scene: transnational corporations, international agencies and organizations, and global civil society. In addition to these two terms, Hayden et al. (2007) suggests some other alternatives, but concludes that at the moment we cannot settle on one

term that would satisfy everyone. Distinctions between the terms are not clear and definitions of the same term can differ.

Approaches to how cultural diversity should be taught within educational programs are also different and the methods have been divided into several categories (Grant & Sleeter, 1989; Banks, 1999). In some approaches individual development and intercultural competences are the focus, whereas in others, societal problems and structural inequities are the starting point in order to develop certain intercultural dimensions of the personality (James, 2005). Banks (1999, pp. 30–32) discusses the following approaches for introducing intercultural issues in education: approaches where minority cultures are regarded as a deviance to be ‘cured’ and normalized; approaches where other cultures are recognized, but are included in the curriculum as separate courses or content areas, as exceptions from the ‘normal’ and mainstream teaching; and approaches where the entire curriculum is reconstructed in a way that acknowledges various perspectives and viewpoints, and thus make students aware of the tendencies of mono-acculturation and ethnocentrism in schools.

According to the first approach, particularly at the times when assimilation policies have been applied, states and schools have taken cultural difference as a handicap. The majority has been considered the norm which immigrants should catch up to through special education and other remedial arrangements. In the other two approaches, the presence of other cultures is recognized as such, but not necessarily as an integral part of school activities. The school curriculum can still be ethnocentric and monocultural, and other cultures are introduced as separate courses, books and theme weeks or through the celebration of certain festivals, heroes or significant incidents of the respective groups. A major problem in mainstream-oriented approach is that it provides pupils with only one way of seeing the world, a way which is usually taken for granted. The third alternative represents more comprehensive approaches that aim to break mono-acculturation and make students conscious of the possible hegemony of mainstream culture and power structures in the society. The goal is to work towards an equal and just society through care, consciousness-raising, critical thinking and democratic societal action. In these approaches, it is acknowledged that intercultural education, which recognizes diversity as a starting point, requires a holistic reform, which includes policy, contents, curricula, methods, school material and the entire. This comprehensive approach means that intercultural education forms a logical continuum, which starts from early childhood and continues throughout the whole educational path to higher education and adult education. In addition to formal education, it includes free-time activities, informal education and work place experiences.

To conclude, intercultural education and pedagogy deal with one aspect of diversity, namely the cultural diversity, and try to identify appropriate means and tools to addressing it in lifelong educational programs. In some views, intercultural education also deals with other dimensions of diversity, as gender or socio-economic background. Therefore, intercultural education can be easily associated with inclusive education, in its largest meaning.

3. Critical pedagogy: the struggle for educating the disadvantaged

While intercultural education addresses mainly the cultural diversity, critical pedagogy generally focuses on problems experienced by different groups of disadvantaged students, especially students with low socio-economical background. However, the framework offered by critical pedagogy covers a wider range of educational issues, and promotes liberation by deconstructing the relation between power and culture. The conceptual basis of critical pedagogy is larger and deeper than presented in this article (and has its roots in the well-established critical theory), but we will further develop some of the substrate and the means suggested for adjusting educational environments to the needs of disadvantaged students.

Firstly proposed by Paulo Freire in the 1970s, as he developed reading programs for the peasants of Brazil, critical pedagogy takes into account the social context of education. A critical pedagogy approach suggests that education is a process of empowerment that enables people to make choices and influence their world. The heart of a critical pedagogy approach to education is that individuals gain a sense of freedom, or liberation, from their constructed views of themselves. Freire challenged educators to include the lives and experiences of their low-income students in developing their literacy, in a highly debated *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1995). Students and teachers critically think about their conditions and their reality, for the purpose of constructing and attempting solutions,

referred to as *action* by Freire. The chain reflection-action is possible through collaboration or dialogue. The key of this approach is represented by an ongoing partnership between action, reflection and dialogue. Through this partnership, Freire introduces *problem-posing education* contrasting the *banking education*. Problem-solving education is conceived as a construction of knowledge through *invention and re-invention*, in relationships with people and the world, enacting a particular way of inquiry. *Banking education* is the contrasting approach, which assumes that knowledge is a possession that teachers need to give to students.

Freire's paradigm allows students to practice a discursive literacy that offers them the ability to theorize, as well as to function in society. Thus, students become part of the decision-making process, using their voices in communicating their thoughts. Moreover, education changes its centre from delivering well-defined knowledge to encourage critical thinking over the world, empowering disadvantaged students to change their lives, and to overcome the boundaries of a certain social class.

The purpose of critical pedagogy is to engage learners in the act of what Freire calls *critical consciousness*, which has been defined as "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1995, p. 17). Reading and writing are important tools in this respect, and therefore Freire advocates "*reading the world*" (1998) as his central pedagogical strategy. "*Reading the world*" radically redefines conventional notions of print-based literacy and conventional school curriculum. For critical pedagogues, the "texts" students and teachers should "decode" are the images of their own concrete, situated experiences with the world. According to Freire, "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35). Thus, reading the world is not a retreat from reading the word, but the two are the foundation of two linked literacies reinforcing each other and directed toward *critical consciousness*.

Further developments of critical pedagogy question whose beliefs, values, and interests get to classroom discourse. They challenge the hidden curriculum that socializes students into the dominant culture, addresses social oppression that may be tied to race, gender, and class (McLaren, 1998; Giroux, 1988), and attempts changing curriculum that fosters the unquestioned transmission of knowledge as "banking deposits". More and more critical pedagogy works go beyond the rural space suggested by Freire, and develop implications of the approach in urban educational environments, while other forms of literacy (as media or technology literacy) are targeted as tools for empowering the disadvantaged in the postmodern society.

Although within Romanian society, the problem of students with disadvantaged background is experienced in most of the schools and classrooms, critical pedagogy is not popular among theorists and practitioners, and one reason that may be coined would be the so-called leftist orientation associated with this educational theory.

2. Feminist pedagogy: ensuring gender equality and building democratic classrooms

A broad feminist movement emerged in the late 1960s and, as a consequence, academic disciplines in all fields have been questioned under the doubts of feminists' critiques. The term feminism evokes a diversity of reactions among educational scientist and teachers, and some of them could be described as unfriendly. Although gender issues are rather popular in educational studies (see for examples the issue of girls' underachievement in sciences), feminist pedagogy is less often used in the search of solutions for improving girls' and women' academic attainment level. Whether feminist pedagogy is conceived of as a strand of critical pedagogy, a particular variant of student-centred teaching, or a vital dimension of the women's studies project (Welch, 2007), its impact to date on Romanian educational theory and practice has been limited.

In education, two feminist influences can be traced: 1) an intensive analysis of curricula and educational practices, in order to reveal, for example, reasons for avoiding women' figures in textbooks, and to uncover the roots of girls' failure in some fields (traditionally associated with male figures and successes); 2) the development of a new academic field – women or gender studies, mainly promoted by women researchers and teachers (Weiler, 1988). A third influential stream may consist in providing non-traditional frameworks for teaching and learning, affecting primarily teacher-student relationships, and classroom atmosphere.

In terms of our aim of proving certain connections of feminist pedagogy with inclusion in education, a multidisciplinary literature review conducted by Webb, Allen and Walker (2002) is important to mention. Their essay provided a detailed description of six *principles of feminist pedagogy*: reformation of the relationship between professor and student, empowerment, building community, privileging voice, respecting the diversity of personal experience, and challenging traditional pedagogical notions. All these principles are certainly applicable to all types of educational environments, and are shared by education scientists who would not define themselves as feminists; the supplementary dimension, if compared with widely accepted pedagogical ideas, is encouraging the girls and women to express their full learning potential, in an educational environment which supports all learners equally.

Obviously, feminist pedagogy is diverse and pluralistic, like feminism in general. To further introduce feminist pedagogical principles, we illustrate some core directions to be followed in feminist classrooms. Feminist teachers typically promote collaboration, cooperative learning, and group discussion, attempting to transform the educational environment into a setting that favors dialogue over expression, and view open debate as central to learning (Cornell, 1998). Consistent with principles supported by group communication specialists, feminist pedagogy subscribes to the idea that the decision of a group is qualitatively or quantitatively better than individual assertions (the so-called assembly effect, Galanes, Adams & Brillhart, 2004). M. Mayberry and M. N. Rees (1999) illustrate this view: they assume that each member of a group brings something to contribute to the collaborative constructions of knowledge, and the knowledge they collectively produce should, eventually, exceed previous knowledge of any member. In other words, each member of the classroom is equally a learner and a potential teacher.

Another important feature of feminist classrooms is that they have a critical focus and political agenda. Feminist pedagogy aims beyond construction of interdisciplinary knowledge, and emphasizes the development of a critical consciousness empowered to apply knowledge to social action and social transformation (Mayberry & Rees, 1999). Therefore, critical thinking and consciousness raise are central components within a feminist classroom. Additionally, critical and active citizenship is encouraged through creation of a cooperative, non-competitive learning environment, where all students' voices could be heard (Mayberry & Rees, 1999). Recognizing the importance of lived experience, civic awareness, and civic engagement, feminist pedagogy provides opportunities for teachers to foster the development of more engaged and informed citizen critics.

Although we summarized only some of the principles supported by feminist pedagogy, a main idea may be outlined: similar to intercultural and critical pedagogy, it addresses the needs of a disadvantaged group (girls and women) by building a far more general framework of teaching and learning, which can be easily accepted by any member of the educational community. It has no exaggerations, but introduces educational principles and advocates for teaching practices aiming to promote the success for all, regardless their gender.

3. Conclusion

Intercultural, critical and feminist pedagogy, as described in previous paragraphs, meet in their fundamental goal – educational and social inclusion of disadvantaged persons, although the theoretical basis, radicality of the discourse and suggested pedagogical interventions may be different.

Feminist pedagogy is tightly linked with critical pedagogy, placing gender in the center of its critique of educational environments. Both critical and feminist educational theory reflect the tension between two opposite educational approaches: the first emphasize the reproduction of existing social, gender and class relationships and the second coins the production of class and gender identities through resistance to imposed knowledge and practices (Weiler, 1998).

Intercultural pedagogy may be easily connected to critical pedagogy, as most ethnic minority groups are disadvantaged within our society and as culture, ethnicity, race are clearly connected with power and authority relations in society. Intercultural pedagogy presents a fundamental perspective to prepare education professionals to work with an increasing population of cultural, economical or language diversity learners, and focuses on the content of cultural pluralism. Critical pedagogy represents a more in-depth perspective of the structural and contextual forces that impact educational experiences of learners within culturally pluralistic environments.

A number of overlapping issues in intercultural, critical and feminist pedagogy may be identified for further reflection on the complexity implied by creating inclusive learning environments: they all seek to explain how schools contribute to creation, re-creation or de-creation of certain social structures; advocate that students should become critical thinkers, capable of examining their own life circumstances for improving the control over their own life track; and address pluralism within education.

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