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Multicultural Education: The Translation Model

Edukacja wielokulturowa.
Model translacyjny

Educational Transformation

This essay begins with the aftermath of a university incident. At one of the universities at which I have taught, a temporary mural had been commissioned to be painted on a series of large windows near the library. The area is heavily trafficked by students who would pass by on their way to the coffee shop in the library—it was in fact the company that ran the coffee shop which commissioned the mural and not the university itself. The mural was to be Thanksgiving themed, and its major inscription at the top was to (and did) read: “Remembering What We Can Be Thankful For”. The artistic depiction itself showed an ocean and three ships, apparently arriving in the Americas, each clearly named: “Nina” “Pinta” and “Santa Maria”. Turkeys and fall leaves adorned the outer edges of the mural, framing it.

The students were the first to complain, chief among them was the president of the student group *La Familia Latina*. He photographed the scene and brought it to my attention nearly the day it went up. Not only did the mural depict a scene of rather as-

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tounding historical confusion—conflating Christopher Columbus’ arrival in the Caribbean with the much later arrival of pilgrims to North America—but more importantly, neither arrival is something for which the indigenous populations of the Americas are clearly thankful. Beyond the cruelty of the conquistadors or later British “settlers”, the plagues which they brought in their wake killed tens of millions and forever changed, often obliterating, their indigenous cultures. The narrative behind the mural, then, is one that (perhaps) only a descendent of the winning side of history would find acceptable. After the complaints began to mount up, the mural was rather unceremoniously erased, with the hope that the incident would be forgotten.

What matters about this incident is that it is of a kind which is so common anymore. It was not, I believe, the result of any malicious intention, but was rather the result of historical ignorance, both of the merely factual sort, and, more importantly, of the sort that concerns the cultural significance of those facts. It was, in short, the sort of incident that one would hope a multicultural education would obviate. And given the ways in which our modern societies are today constituted by such a plurality of cultural backgrounds, it provides a reminder of the need for this kind of education. It is a need not only to avoid such incidents, which hurt certain populations among our multinational, modern states, but also to promote a greater harmony among those peoples.

James Banks is among the most influential proponents of a transformative multicultural education, and his projects, along with his like-minded theorists, are animated explicitly by social justice aims. Banks, for example, develops what he calls the “Social Action Approach” to multicultural education. Regarding its aim, he writes:

A major goal of the social action approach is to help students acquire the knowledge, values, and skills they need to participate in social change so that victimized and excluded ethnic and racial groups can become full participants in U.S. society and so the nation will move closer to attaining its democratic ideals.¹

¹ J. Banks, “Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform”, in: *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, eds. J. Banks, C. Banks, New York 2001, p. 236.

Unlike others in their field, however, Banks hoped that a multicultural education would be transformative of school curricula and practices, not merely additive, a bit of mixing and stirring in an otherwise uniform syllabus. Sonia Nieto, one of Banks' collaborators, puts the point in the following way:

Many people assume that multicultural education is little more than isolated lessons in sensitivity training or prejudice reduction, or separate units about cultural artifacts or ethnic holidays [...]. If conceptualized in this way, multicultural education will have little influence on student learning.²

The “mix and stir” approach to multicultural education, then, may in fact undermine the stated aims of multiculturalism because it does not take care to change the attitudes, or points of view, which undergird prejudicial beliefs. Banks, Nieto and others in their field have been helpful, moreover, in developing a series of concrete strategies that might be employed in the classroom when teaching multicultural topics.

A difficulty has, nevertheless, emerged. It has been thought that teaching students and future professionals to be more culturally competent would facilitate achieving the aims outlined. Recent scholarship, however, suggests that this premise is not true. If, for example, the education focuses on teaching cultural competence through the memorization of sets of ethnic traits, or core sets of belief, then the education may lead to rather dangerous stereotyping—the “Chinese believe this”, while “Mexicans believe that”, Arthur Kleinman and Peter Benson provide a dramatic illustration of the difficulty in a medical setting.

A medical anthropologist is asked by a pediatrician in California to consult in the care of a Mexican man who is HIV positive. The man's wife had died of aids one year ago. He has a four-year-old son who is HIV positive, but he has not been bringing the child in regularly for care. The explanation given by the clinicians assumed that the problem turned on a radically different cultural understanding. What the anthropologist found, though, was to the contrary. The man had a near complete understanding of HIV/AIDS and its treatment—largely through the support

² S. Nieto, “School Reform and Student Learning: A Multicultural Perspective”, in: *Multicultural Education*, eds. J. Banks, C. Banks, New York 2001, p. 383.



of a local nonprofit organization aimed at supporting Mexican-American patients with HIV. However, he was a very-low-paid bus driver, often working late-night shifts, and he had no time to take his son to the clinic to receive care for him as regularly as his doctors requested. His failure to attend was not because of cultural differences, but rather his practical, socioeconomic situation. Talking with him and talking into account his “local world” were more useful than positing radically different Mexican health beliefs.³

One may understand rather quickly with this case just why cultural competency models of education may fail to achieve the goals of multicultural educational theorists. This is likely why Banks, in his most recent edition to his *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies* has focused on strategies that would enable students to make better reflective decisions.⁴ Yet the work itself still focuses, for most of its chapters, on the major ethnic groups in the United States and their cultural characteristics. What is needed, it seems, is another model of multicultural education that is unlike the trait list form of cultural competence, which focuses on characteristics of cultural groups (something that is always in fact fluid), and yet could guide teachers in planning their classes. It is with respect to this deficiency that the present essay hopes to make some strides.

What the present essay sets out is a model for a transformative multicultural education by developing Paul Ricoeur’s understanding of translation. The idea, at base, is that the process of translation provides a roadmap for acquiring the appropriate abilities needed to achieve the aims of a transformative multicultural education. It is, however, a model which is self-conscious of its limits, since it does not seem to me that a single approach to multicultural education can satisfy all goals. There are, in short, some conditions that must be met before this model can be profitably employed.

The matter at hand, then, takes some care in execution in order to be successful. So I begin with Ricoeur’s understanding of translation as the production of a new kind of meaning, especially in the case

³ A. Kleinman, P. Benson, “Anthropology in the Clinic: The Problem of Cultural Competency and How to Fix it”, *PLOS Medicine* 2006, vol. 3, no. 10, p. 1673.

⁴ See Banks’ preface to the eighth edition as well as the structure of multicultural education he develops in the first section in J. Banks, *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies*, New York 2008 for this specific focus.

where a translator is forced to make use of merely comparable, but not identical terms—when she must do her best because a word or phrase is not directly translatable into another language. After I will move to extend the basic structure of this process to a model for transformative education.

Ricoeur's Model of Translation

Ricoeur is a broadly humanist thinker in the “Continental” tradition of philosophy, and his chief works aim to understand how we can make sense of matters that are central to our self-understanding as human beings, but which have proven rather intractable for scientific approaches. At the heart of his philosophic work, he wanted to know what it meant to be a human being in our modern period, and he thought that some of our best answers were provided not through propositional analysis (though this too he considered significant), but through an analysis of symbols, myths, metaphors, narratives, and, importantly for the present purposes, translation. This last matter may seem to sit oddly with the previous members of the group, but what interested Ricoeur in translation was especially the way that the practice of translation works in the limit cases of untranslatable terms or phrases. Something important happens here, he thought, a sort of fusion of cultural horizons that expresses deep features of our human condition as it develops in our pluralistic, globalized world. It is because of this feature, I think, that it could also prove useful for a multicultural education. Since my aim is to develop Ricoeur's thought, I would like here to follow Ricoeur as he addresses the topic of translation for its own sake, before moving to my account.

Although Ricoeur writes on translation in a number of places, the core of his thought is distilled in a small text entitled *On Translation*. There, he begins his account with a simple observation, a fact: there is translation. While obvious, this fact is the source of a philosophic problem. He writes:

This simple fact has given rise to huge speculation, which has let itself become locked into ruinous alternatives from which it must extricate itself. These paralyzing alternatives are the following: either the diversity of language gives expression to a radical heterogeneity—and in that case translation is theoretically impossible; one language is untranslatable



a priori into another. Or else, taken as a fact, translation is explained by a common fund that renders the fact of translation possible; but then we must be able either to *find* this common fund, and this is the *original* language track, or to reconstruct it logically, and this is the *universal* language track.⁵

Clearly, because there is translation, philosophers have busied themselves with either of these two tracks. In the former, seekers of the original language, one finds the Gnostics, followers of the Kabbala, and even Walter Benjamin (in his own way). In the latter, which has certainly garnered the better part of philosophic attention, one finds Bacon, Leibniz, and of course Noam Chomsky. No original language has been found, of course, and despite the advances Chomsky has made, no full *a priori* transformation grammar has been produced either.

This set of dismal results is not accidental. The pursuit, Ricoeur argues, had to fail, and for two reasons. In his own words:

first, there is no consensus on what would characterize a perfect language at the level of the lexicon of original ideas entering into composition; this consensus presupposes a total equivalence between the sign and the thing, without anything arbitrary, thus more broadly between language and the world [...]. The second, even more fearsome, stumbling block is: no one can say how the natural languages, with all the peculiarities which we will talk about later, could be derived from the supposed perfect language: the *gap* between the universal and empirical languages, between what is *a priori* and what is historical, certainly appears insurmountable.⁶

Thus because there is no consensus on what a perfect language would be (at least not any more), and because it is unclear how one could express the derivation of natural languages from such a perfect language, the project of finding (even) an *a priori* grammar is doomed to fail.

In the wake of this failure, Ricoeur argues that we find an opportunity. This impasse at the level of the *a priori* turns into a “pass” for the *a posteriori*. “I suggest”, he writes, “that we need to get beyond these historical alternatives, translatable *versus* untranslatable, and to replace them with new practical alternatives, stemming from the very

⁵ P. Ricoeur, *On Translation*, transl. E. Brenan, New York 2007, p. 13.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

exercise of translation”.⁷ It is in looking at how translation happens, in short, that we shall find an answer which explains just how it is that translation is possible, despite the apparent theoretical impossibilities that face it.

Ricoeur’s answer to this theoretical conundrum is that in translation we find the creation of a new kind of sense, which was not present either in the original language or the translated language, but which serves as a sort of bridge between the two, and which allows comprehension. He calls these bridges “comparables”, and the process of translation itself the “construction of comparables”. He elaborates as follows:

Let us apply the following formula to translation: ‘constructing comparables’. I found an illustration of the application of this formula in the interpretation that a brilliant French sinologist, François Jullien, gives of the relationship between ancient China and ancient classical Greece. His thesis, which I do not dispute, but which I take as a working hypothesis, is that Chinese is the absolute *other* of Greek—that knowledge of the inside of Chinese amounts to a deconstruction of what is outside, of what is exterior, i.e. thinking and speaking Greek. Thus, in his last book, entitled *Du temps* [Of Time], Jullien maintains that Chinese verbs do not have tenses because Chinese does not have the concept of time worked out by Aristotle in *Physics IV*, then reconstructed by Kant in ‘The Transcendental Aesthetic’, and finally universalized by Hegel through the ideas of the *negative* and the *Aufhebung*. Hegel’s whole book takes the form: ‘there is not... there is not... but there is’. So I raise the question: how do we speak (in French) about *what there is* in Chinese? Now Jullien does not utter a word of Chinese in his book (apart from *yin-yang!*); he speaks in French, in a beautiful language I may add, about what there is in place of time, i.e. the seasons, occasions, roots and leaves, springs and incoming tides. By doing this, he constructs comparables.⁸

It is important to understand that these comparable terms mark the emergence of something new, not present in either language before. The translator, then, plays the role of a subject to an event in meaning, facilitating the emergence of novelty, but, one should say, not its sole author.

Ricoeur makes the grounds for this latter point clear in what follows the passage just quoted. One does not translate words, simply,

⁷ Ibidem, p. 14.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 36.



but rather works to translate the meaning of the terms in the whole culture, moving “down” (metaphorically) through levels of specificity, to the words themselves. He writes:

By doing this, he [i.e. the translator] constructs comparables. And he constructs them downwards, as I mentioned above with reference to what one does while translating, i.e. from the general intuition concerning the difference in the ‘fold’, passing through the works, the Chinese classics, and then going down towards the words.⁹

He elaborates on what is intended by providing a few canonical examples:

But is that not what happened in several periods of our own culture, when the Seventy translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek, into what we call the Septuagint, something that Hebrew specialists alone can criticize at their leisure? And St. Jerome did it again with the Vulgate, constructing a Latin comparable. But before Jerome the Latins had created comparables, by deciding for all of us that *arete* was translated by *virtus*, *polis* by *urbs* and *polites* by *civis*. To remain in the biblical domain, we could say that Luther not only constructed a comparable in translating the Bible into German, in ‘germanizing’ it, as he dared to say, in the face of St. Jerome’s Latin, but created the German language, as comparable to Latin, to the Greek of the Septuagint, and to the Hebrew of the Bible.¹⁰

Acting in this way, comparables bridge cultural understanding through the creation of new sense—contingency making the way where an *a priori* grammar could not. On this account, interestingly, radical translation is possible, and a fact. Cultural traditions, Ricoeur’s examples suggest, seem to be the result of just such encounters. The continuity among Greeks and Germans is the result of effort, not natural coincidence, and we ought to understand such results as achievements of the human spirit, rather than given facts of history.

Translation for Multicultural Education

The aim in developing the model of translation, understood as a hermeneutic activity, for education is to avoid some of the pitfalls of the traits model of cultural competence. The translation model eschews

⁹ Ibidem, pp. 36–37.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 37.

the “trait list approach”, which presumes to understand a culture as something static that can be reduced to a number of simple maxims like “Jews don’t eat pork, but the Chinese do”. Rather, the focus is on understanding the Other’s (i.e. the other person’s) point of view.

It is important to disambiguate, then, the various models of racial or ethnic identity development, such as Helms Racial Identity Model¹¹ or Banks’ Typology of Ethnic Identity¹², which are sometimes used to assess cultural competency, from the pedagogical model that is the subject of discussion here. What is presently proposed is intended to be compatible with these developmental models, and could be measured by some of the same instruments (e.g. the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale or WRIAS test) that have been used to corroborate the accuracy of those developmental models.¹³ But it is important to emphasize that what is at stake here is a pedagogical model that develops a philosophic position about human meaning and culture.

In moving to the model of translation, then, it is helpful to distinguish five principle moments—I hesitate to say steps, because they do not all follow a simple linear path. First, one begins by noting two “fragile” conditions that must reasonably be met. By “fragile” in this case I mean both that they will not always be given for a set of students, and that there are no universal and necessary criteria for determining when they are met. In practice, however, the cases should be clear enough to be useful. The two fragile conditions I have in mind are the following: first, a relatively coherent and known existing cultural background for the existing student population, and second, a similar cultural background and network for the “new” or foreign culture to be learned. If the students or future professionals of a class do not share enough in common, having at most a small number of cultural backgrounds, then it may be difficult to facilitate their un-

¹¹ I have in mind the model Janet Helms develops in “Toward a Theoretical Explanation of the Effects of Race on Counseling: A Black and White Model”, *Counseling Psychologist*, 1984, vol. 12, pp. 153–165 and *Black and White Racial Identity: Theory, Research and Practice*, New York 1990.

¹² I have in mind the model James Banks develops in *Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice*, Needham Heights 1994.

¹³ For the extent of such corroboration, see G. McAllister, J. Irvine, “Cross Cultural Competency and Multicultural Teacher Education”, *Review of Educational Research* 2000, vol. 70, pp. 3–24.



derstanding of a single new culture. To teach in a culturally congruent way, education must include adjustments to questioning styles, choices of texts, written and spoken language, and so on.¹⁴ With respect to the second condition, it is important to recognize two aspects about cultures: they are not homogeneous even for a single period of time, so that there are always dissenters to major positions, and so on, and second, that certain culturally salient social groups may not have a single specific culture or they may cross a number of cultures. It is not clear, for example, that persons with disabilities share a common culture anywhere in the world, though certain members of the deaf community do share one. Latinos/as, by contrast, share multiple cultures, with a common focal point emanating from the Spanish conquest, but differing rather dramatically from there. Should the student body be relatively cohesive in their own experiences, and the discussed culture also be specifically defined, then the proposed translation model could be used.

As a second moment, it is important to prepare students with respect to their own self-acceptance. Here Banks makes an important point. He writes:

Self-acceptance is a prerequisite to accepting and responding positively to other people. Individuals are more likely to gain self-acceptance when they have experienced positive contact with other groups as well as achieved some measure of economic and psychological security.¹⁵

Banks makes this point as part of his own understanding of the third phase of ethnic identity development. It is a focal matter in the third stage (of six), which he terms *ethnic identity clarification*. The point that I have in mind is somewhat different, since I am concerned rather with learner readiness. Not all students or professionals will be at the same level of development and it is important to consider this point. To facilitate learning, participants should be made to explore their own culture in the early stages of a program, since this appears to enable them to move onto other stages of development more readily.¹⁶

¹⁴ Lisa Delpit develops this point at length in her *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, New York 2006.

¹⁵ J. Banks, *Multicultural education*, op. cit., p. 225.

¹⁶ Support for this point can be found in P.S. Brown, T.A. Parham, R.A. Yonker, "Influence of a Cross-Cultural Training Course on Racial Identity Attitudes

Turning to the third moment of the model, the Ricoeurian account suggests that one ought to distinguish among a variety of levels in a culture—this is what the downward direction of translation indicates: a “movement” from knowledge of broad historical significance to the individual word on the page. For pedagogical purposes, one might say that there are three increasingly specific domains a multicultural education should address. To make the matter a bit clearer, I shall use how teaching an historical people, the pre-Columbian Aztecs, might function in this context, later generalizing.

The first level is the traditional sort, which, as one finds in the work of Banks among others, focuses on major events, works, and controversies. This is the historically informed world of a people. For the Aztecs, or more accurately the Nahuas, their historical world concerns their migration South to the area of what is now central Mexico, their founding myths, and how the “Aztec Empire” was formed through an uneasy alliance among three competing cities in the lake Tezcoco region: Tlacopan, Tezcoco, and Tenochtitlan. A controversy here, clearly, is the practice of human sacrifice, how the practice emerged, what basis it has in their myths, and how it was contested in the region among other Nahuatl speaking peoples.

Descending to a more specific domain, one’s pedagogy should aim to address a local world among a people. The city of Tezcoco, for example, was more culturally and artistically focused than the militarily minded Tenochtitlan. It is from Tezcoco, moreover, that we have some of the most sustained philosophic reflection on the character of the human condition, as well as criticisms of the prevailing religious myths. While part of the broader Nahuatl world, Tezcoco, its rulers and people, pursued a fundamentally different course. They saw their primary task as one of finding rootedness on our changing and evanescent earth, which required the development of character traits in order to assume a “face” (*ixtli*), or seat of judgment, rather than a quest for the blood of new victims.¹⁷ This latter aim, one comes

of White Women and Men: Preliminary Perspectives”, *Journal of Counseling and Development* 1996, vol. 74, pp. 510–516. See D. York, *Cross-Cultural Training Programs*, Westport 1994.

¹⁷ Nearly all of this has been covered in Nahua scholarship for decades, even in English translation. See, for example, M. León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, transl. J. Emory Davis, Norman



to recognize, rather comfortably justified an aggressive and expansionist military program that had little to do with some of the core commitments of the traditional Nahuas.

Finally, one should focus one's attention on a very specific matter—and individual text, or a person in the local world. One might look, say, to the life of Nezahualcoyotl, both a king of Tezcoco, and a philosopher. His specific writings openly question central religious commitments, and one might understand his purpose in writing to be one of finding a reasonable response to identified tensions within that religious outlook. The individual person, or text, then shows the final area of divergence within the broader cultural horizon examined.

Moving to generalize this illustration, one might note how almost all multicultural courses, or curricula, could be constructed to avoid the shortcomings of the “trait list approach”. A course which covers the development of jazz in the United States could focus on the broader historical, political and musical trends at the time, descend to specific concerns in New Orleans, and then finally move to individuals who contributed to specific innovations, or to individual pieces that were path breaking. The same trajectory is applicable for those hoping to train future professionals, such as physician's assistants, medical doctors, nurses, or emergency medical technicians. Rather than teaching a list of traits, “Latinos are like this”, one could instead focus on the broader history of Latinos/as in the United States, moving more specifically to why so many live, for example, in San Antonio or New York City, and then to individual cases and concerns that have arisen that are medically pertinent. The purpose of this “descending” method is to add the required specificity to the trait-list approach, which has yielded undesirable outcomes. From the present perspective, one notes, such an approach to cultural competence remains trapped almost exclusively at the first level of historical significance, and the model of translation overcomes this deficit (in part) through the development of additional levels of focus.

Structuring a curriculum to meet the descending levels, however, only takes one to the third moment in the proposed model. The fourth concerns a moment that is analogous to the construction of

1963, and *Fifteen Poets of the Aztec World*, Norman 1992.

comparable terms in translation. What is required at this stage is that students and future professionals develop the ability to think through a matter “between both sides” of the cultural divide, as it were, to produce a point of view which explains the experiences of one in terms that the other could understand. What is hoped is that students and future professionals will acquire the *ability* to recount a comparable experience. In many cases, this is likely to require that students gain the ability to tell the story as the other as inhabitants of the other culture would have understood it. When Cortes was driven from Tenochtitlan and many hundreds of Spaniards died, why is it that the indigenous would not have called the night “*la noche triste*” (the sad night)? How would they have understood it, and why? Moreover, why did the Spaniards call it that? What was their sense of purpose? The ability to occupy this middle position, between the sides, and to construct a comparable experience is, on the model of translation, the hallmark of this form of multicultural education.

There are a number of specific techniques one might use to foster this ability, though I shall highlight only three here. The simplest, perhaps, is to have students review narratives, whether in the form of film or texts. Documentaries and fiction work equally well for this purpose, provided the fiction is accurate enough. To learn how the Nahuas understood the conquest one could read their collected responses in *Broken Spears*,¹⁸ but one might also read Gary Jennings’s *Aztec*,¹⁹ which is quite accurate and perhaps a better narrative. Next, one might have students or future professionals examine discrepancies in historical literature or existing testimonials. Interestingly, the night that Pedro de Alvarado slaughtered thousands of Nahuas, without pretext, during a major festival in Tenochtitlan, the Spaniard’s written summary of the event and those of the indigenous are almost identical. Nevertheless, the Spaniard’s and indigenous’ interpretation of the significance of the events diverge quite widely. Here students might try to reflect on why that is. In a medical context, one might note that there are rather interesting discrepancies among Latinos/as on how the many problems of immigration are to be understood and

¹⁸ M. León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, transl. L. Kemp, Boston 2006.

¹⁹ G. Jennings, *Aztec*, New York 1980.



addressed. Examining these could give future medical practitioners ample material to avoid mistaken preconceptions in treating patients. A Latino might miss a treatment because he is afraid of deportation, but he might also think that treatment in Mexico is cheaper and so be simply postponing until he returns.

A final technique, somewhat implicit in the foregoing, is the use of simulation. I have in mind interventions like the following. Suppose your friend has determined that she enjoys online videogames so much, that, rather than accept a scholarship to graduate school to pursue a degree in physics, she wants instead only to take a low-end job which will afford her the time and leisure enough to play this game. She has no children or other obligations. How would the Nahuas view wasting one's talents like this? Or returning to a case mentioned above, suppose one of your patients is a Latino male in his mid-twenties and has been irregular in follow-up treatments. What might be the causes of this, and how would you go about finding an answer? How would you best care for him? These sorts of simulations are the kind of specific interventions needed to foster students' ability to articulate comparable experiences.

Yet, if the hall-mark of the translation model is the ability to construct comparable experiences, then it must also be emphasized that the ultimate goal of this approach is to enable students and future professionals to pursue this aim for themselves. The fifth and final moment of the model of translation, then, is that students should gain the ability to perform the same sorts of activities for themselves with respect to further cultures, or peoples. Our multicultural existence, after all, is a changing landscape and without this final ability to reproduce this skill in the future, their understanding of other people and cultures will reflect an outdated and ossified conception. Having done it at least one time well, then perhaps students will be able, in a term project say, to try their own hand at the process.

Aims and Limits of Multiculturalism

Having laid out the major moments of the translation model for multicultural education, I pause here to review both how it accomplishes the broader aims of transformative multiculturalism, and what limits it has.

Four of the primary aims of transformative multiculturalists are the following: to promote societal transformation, to break down prejudiced attitudes (explicit and implicit), to promote the skills to understand another culture or set of practices, and finally to set the record straight about our histories.²⁰ The model that has been sketched above fairly clearly accomplishes the last two of these. The fourth and fifth moments are explicitly devoted to understanding another culture or set of practices from the Other's perspective, and the descending movement through cultural levels aims to appropriately contextualize historical events and their surrounding controversies. The break-down of prejudiced attitudes is something that can occur (unfortunately) only in stages, so that a person may retain anti-black sentiment while nevertheless learning to appreciate Japanese culture and their people. The model of translation, nevertheless, fosters the break-down of prejudiced attitudes by enabling students to understand events and practices from the Other's perspective, where this Other is often part of an oppressed social group. This happens, of course, only one group at a time, but the model does take positive steps to accomplishing this aim. Finally, with respect to transforming society, one notes that when Banks and others write of this goal, the hope has always been that such a goal would be accomplished by promulgating multicultural pedagogical techniques. One model cannot accomplish this aim on its own. Yet, the model of translation does contribute to this broader aim, insofar as it is able to overcome the deficiencies of teaching cultural competence through traits or context-free characteristics. Moreover in aiming to provide students and future professionals with the ability to construct new comparable experiences for themselves, the model of translation provides the means for a project of life-long learning.

²⁰ On the first three aims, see J. Banks, "Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform", op. cit., pp. 225–246 and C. Sleeter, C. Grant, "Race, Class, Gender, and Disability in the Classroom", in: *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, eds. J. Banks, C. Banks, New York 2001, pp. 68–69. On the last point, see R. Reich, *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education*, Chicago 2002, p.131 and G. Nash, "Multiculturalism and History: Historical Perspectives and Present Prospects", in: *Public Education in a Multicultural Society: Policy, Theory, Critique*, ed. R. Fullinwider, Cambridge 1996, p. 183.



The model of translation, then, does accomplish several of the central aims of transformative multiculturalism. Yet, the model also has two specific limitations. The first is that the educational program is supported by a broad ethical commitment. Its goal is not to promote toleration for toleration's sake, but rather to promote toleration and respect where peoples are deserving of respect and toleration. This is why, in the above example, I used the teaching of the Aztec culture for illustrative purposes. Not everything that a people does is to be tolerated or respected, and a careful examination of the various levels of culture—enacting the descending movement—reveals that the Nahuas were far from endorsing human sacrifice universally and unambiguously. Tlaxcala, a local neighbor to Tenochtitlan, loathed the “flowery wars” in which human sacrifice was practiced, and sided with Cortes in part to end them. Nezahualcoyotl, a ruler of Tezcoco nearly a century before Cortes, never even considers blood sacrifice (much less heart sacrifice) as integral to solving the major problems of the human condition. Such practices are understood well, then, when condemned, and recognizing the broader diversity of attitudes among the Nahuas to the practice of heart sacrifice enables one to respect the culture without endorsing this aspect.

A second limitation is that the model of translation will not suit all needs among the proponents of multicultural education.²¹ One, specifically, is the need to preserve a traditional way of life. Will Kymlicka, for example, defends this notion (as a right) in his *Multicultural Citizenship*, arguing that we “should aim at ensuring that all national groups have the opportunity to maintain themselves as a distinct culture, if they choose. This insures that the good of cultural membership is equally protected for the members of all national groups”.²² Minority group cultural preservation may be an aim for multicultural education, but the aims of the present model are clearly inconsistent with this goal. Preserving a minority culture may be better served by an exclusive rather than an inclusive curriculum, and as a result, if an exclusive curriculum is a goal worth

²¹ Meira Levinson makes this case quite impressively in “Mapping Multicultural Education”, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, ed. H. Siegel, New York 2009, pp. 428–450.

²² W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, Oxford 1995, p. 113.

pursuing, then I need to underscore that the translation model is not the appropriate choice, since its focus is on cross-cultural abilities—specifically the ability to construct comparable experiences, which sit “between” broader cultural understandings. While I have hopes, then, that the present model of education could be successfully implemented for transformative purposes, I do not advocate it for all contexts or aims.

Concluding Thoughts

We live in a world that is the fruit of a plurality of practices, of customs, and of ways of life. This diversity in the expression of our human personality is an achievement—and yet it is also a barrier to our mutual comprehension, to our intergenerational struggle to make a better way in the cosmos. The problems of a multicultural education are enduring, then, because they appear to stem from the very limits of our human condition. I began this piece by recalling a specific incident that is typical of the kind of miscommunication and mutual hurt that emerges from our plural, multinational world. I do not think that any system of education can eradicate that sort of incident. That such occurrences are likely to continue is an indication of the faults of our human finitude. Yet our finitude also holds out the possibility for its perfection, and it is here that one finds a place for the project of a transformative multicultural education.

The specific need for the translation model that I have outlined in the present piece emerges from the limitations of a cultural competency model, specifically that which focuses on teaching students and future professionals lists of traits and characteristics of socially oppressed groups. This is done with the hope of enabling these future practitioners to make better decisions, to provide better care, in the course of their own work. Surprisingly, that approach has led to well-intentioned mistakes—ones of a sort that should have been avoided. What the translation model proposes is a deepening of the existing cultural competency model, not by way of elaborating the stages of cultural competency development, but by way of articulating the moments that educators should seek to incorporate into their classrooms, into their curricula, into—one can hope—the spirit of their educational institutions. There are five moments to this model,



which move from assessment of applicability and preparation of the student population, to a generalized ability to acquire the capacity to articulate a “comparative experience”.

I have also stressed throughout that there are limits to the present approach. Some of these are of the mundane sort that emerge from the subject matter or character of the student body itself. Yet others stem, I think, from the rather divergent goals of multicultural education itself. It would be foolhardy to suppose that all these goals could be satisfied by one approach. Yet, if one is thoughtful in the application of pedagogical techniques, then I suggest that the translation model can accomplish many of the central aims for a transformative multicultural education. In this sense I understand the present essay to be a contribution to the broader goals Banks, Nieto, and many others have developed over the past several decades.

I close with a suggestion for future work, since what is here sketched is just a beginning. What needs to be assessed is whether the proposed model is effective in its stated aims, and whether it is pedagogically orienting in a helpful way. I have taken away the list of traits future professionals were supposed to learn and replaced them, following Paul Ricoeur’s lead, with a process—one which focuses on a final ability, which would hopefully be generalizable. Does this process lead to better outcomes on standard measures? Do students retain this ability over a longer course of their lives? How exactly would we assess these points? At the very least, then, there is much yet to do, and much for which we can hope.

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Streszczenie

Zwolennicy edukacji wielokulturowej od dawna utrzymywali, że głównym celem ma być nauczanie wiedzy i umiejętności z zakresu kultury. Ten cel często bywa osiągnięty poprzez nauczanie studentów i szkolenie pracowników na temat rozmaitych cech oraz ogólnej charakterystyki członków marginalizowanych grup społecznych. Jednakże ostatnie badania wskazują, że podejście to często uniemożliwia osobom je praktykującym wyciąganie właściwych wniosków, przyczyniając się do pogorszenia efektów nauczania. Wydaje się, że potrzebny jest nowy model pedagogiki kulturowej, który będzie charakteryzować się odmiennym lub bardziej ostrożnym stanowiskiem. Powyższy artykuł stara się taki model stworzyć poprzez rozwinięcie Ricoeurowskiego modelu translacyjnego w sferze edukacji wielokulturowej.

Summary

Proponents of multicultural education have long held that teaching for cultural competency is a primary aim. This has often been accomplished through educating students and professionals about the various traits and general characteristics which members of oppressed social groups would generally exhibit. Recent scholarship, however, suggests that this approach often inhibits practitioners from making the appropriate insights, making for worse and not better outcomes. What is needed, it would seem, is a new model of pedagogy for cultural competency which takes up a different, or more careful approach. The present essay does just this by developing Paul Ricoeur's account of translation for multicultural education.

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