



Jerzy Nikitorowicz

University of Białystok

ORCID 0000-0003-4371-8322

Comparative and cross-cultural education in the context of cultural diversity

Abstract: The aim of the article is to draw attention to the new challenges and tasks of the two sub-disciplines of education (comparative and cross-cultural education) in the face of widespread cultural diversity, growing nationalisms and the ongoing war in Ukraine. The author assumes that cultural diversity is the civilisational wealth of mankind, therefore these sub-disciplines are confronted with the challenge of conducting, in a conscious and responsible manner, the educational activities that provide knowledge about their own culture and other cultures and their representatives. The author presents numerous problems that these subdisciplines have to address, ranging from the awareness of the value of inherited culture to the need and necessity to transcend one's own ethnocentrism and sociocentrism. He poses numerous questions, refers to historical facts, points to the need for the emancipation of national memories, etc.

What is seen as the fundamental challenge for comparative and cross-cultural education is the one of liberating oneself from hyper-subordination and the ability to engage in a dialogue free from propaganda that intends to dominate the thinking and attitudes oriented towards cognition, understanding, cooperation, collaboration.

Keywords: comparative education, cross-cultural education, cultural diversity, identity, dialogue of cultures.

Introductory statements

In the process of development, each sub-discipline expands its scope of analysis and research, undertakes new challenges, exchanges experiences with others, enriches and complements each other, and deepens its field of interest. The phenomenon of cultural diversity and the processes taking place in this context in the contemporary world highlight it more and more apparently in numerous scientific fields, disciplines and sub-disciplines, indicating the need to embark on new challenges, to define and implement new tasks. This is also true for comparative and cross-cultural education, which already in their very name seem to immanently contain the issue of cultural diversity and cultural difference. I would like to point out that racial, ethnic, religious, national, cultural pluralism does not exhaust the new diversity, the need for and possibility of reference and comparison. We are currently witnessing an unprecedented 'diversification of diversity', a multiplication of significant variables determining human needs, aspirations, plans and ambitions. The constantly expanding area of multiculturalism is the result of processes of movement of people on the globe, processes tied to economic and demographic problems, mobility, migration of various types, refugees, family reunification, cognitively, educationally, culturally and economically motivated peregrinations, natural cognitive curiosity about other cultures, the accession of new countries to the EU, etc. These processes and phenomena overlap with the problem of the classical understanding of multiculturalism (the dimension of ethnicity resident in a specific territory, in the area of contact and transitional borderlands, of centuries-old cultural diversity in a specific geographical area, etc.).

I believe that cultural diversity is the civilisational wealth of humanity, and therefore we are faced with the challenge of protecting this wealth, being responsible for it, and consciously undertaking educational activities in terms of providing knowledge about our own culture as well as other cultures and their representatives. Renata Nowakowska-Siuta (2014, p. 22) points out that 'Different cultures are at the same time the cause of crises and conflicts, hence the cross-cultural dialogue, verification of perceptions about other cultures, overcoming stereotypes are the most crucial challenges of comparative education in the 21st century'. She stresses that the preservation of national heritage is the responsibility of each country whilst benefiting from the experience of other countries, thus avoiding mistakes in the design of its own educational policy. I believe, therefore, that the awareness of cultural values, norms and patterns, the awareness of practices and experiences related to inherited and acquired values as the highest level of

psychological development, characteristic of human beings, is particularly important (Sztompka, 2002, p. 28-29).

I treat and perceive the awareness of the value of my own culture and other cultures, the possibility of references and comparisons, with regard to the above-mentioned sub-disciplines of education, in the axiological and teleological, but also epistemological context. I am convinced of the importance of the content of native culture as well as of different cultures, transmitted, perceived, assimilated and cultivated, of the ways in which they are utilised, of transgressing the limits of one's own culture or of closing oneself within the limits of a particular culture. I would also like to note the ontological aspect related to numerous issues of being and fulfilling oneself in the contemporary world, functioning in the face of multiple threats at the level of micro, meso- and macro-structures, orientation towards dialogue and conscious integration of cultures.

Comparative and cross-cultural education towards the issues of inherited and institutionally shaped identities

The awareness of living in a multicultural world, starting from the local scale and up to the global one, raises numerous problems related to individual identity, as well as identity of nations, countries and their cultures (Nikitorowicz, 2022, p. 21-38). The power of being Different in terms of culture is a tragedy and joy that intensifies the need to formulate currently important existential questions that are of interest to comparative and cross-cultural education, including those formulated by Barbara Skarga (2009, p. 384).

‘... is it possible to negate this experience of the self, the desire to perpetuate one's own separateness and “I”, or the experience of loneliness in which the I so acutely reveals itself to the self?...’ Can one negate the experience of the self when it is awakened by guilt and shame? Finally, is it possible to negate the meaning of this persistent search for oneself?

Hence, a particularly important task of comparative education and cross-cultural education in a multipolar world is to support the awareness of inherited values, norms and patterns of the native culture, which should be the base, the foundation on which further elements of identity can be built. A person naturally ‘immersed’ in his or her native culture inherits unconsciously, but it is this heritage, its content, the forms and strength of its transmission, the methods of influence, the conditions and circumstances in which such transmission takes place, that determine in the future the

meaning of this content in new conditions, situations, contexts. It is indisputable that we inherit elements of culture such as language, belief, religion, spatial location, lifestyle, traditions, customs, habits, rituals, the history and lot of our family, etc. Can any of these, in the context of Skarga's indications, evoke feelings of guilt and shame?

Most certainly yes, especially when there is a narrative imposed from the highest level related to state policy, institutional educational policy, media policy, national or supranational policy. The ongoing war in Ukraine makes us realise on a daily basis how much can change in the thinking, attitudes, reactions and behaviour towards each other, how much can change in relations between nations, in Europe and in the world.

From years of my research experience in the borderlands of north-eastern Poland it is clear that a new education policy is needed in this regard, a policy leading to the acquisition of awareness of the value of inherited culture by every citizen. In a situation of guilt or shame, it is necessary to 'work through' such states responsibly. Yuval Noah Harari (2018) points out that the greatest contemporary challenge is to teach children not to feel disempowered, confined within conventions. They need to be taught to respond and represent their respective conditions, to be able to think with the future in mind, to shape the conditions for solving the problems of global human civilisation (crisis of democracy, wars, terrorism, global warming, access to water, clean air, pollution of the world, etc.).

It is the duty of every sub-discipline of education, especially of comparative and cross-cultural education, to learn from various events in human history. For example, from one that lasted for two centuries in Canada. Settlers from Europe carried out deliberate destructive actions against the culture of the First Nations. Canada, now proud of its multi-ethnicity, used to fund boarding schools run mainly by the Catholic Church for indigenous children. They persecuted all that belonged to these cultures, 'knocked out' of the children's heads their native language. The children were stripped off of their identity by being assigned numbers, not allowed to use their names, humiliated, beaten with a belt, whipped, molested, punished with an electric chair, sexually abused, etc. It was not until two centuries later, when it was finally understood that the rhythm of life of the First Nations disrupted by the settlers' proposition of a different work ethic and raising children away from their families failed, and that assimilation activities introduced by violence were counterproductive.

What was the reason for destroying indigenous values which should have been protected and on the foundation of which identity could have been shaped? Why impose values destroying the cultural heritage of their ancestors? Where did such a barbaric idea come from to take children away from the indigenous people and shape them according to the European fashion? ‘The government decided to launch social engineering to raise generations of farmers and lumberjacks and obedient wives’ (Gierak-Onoszko, 2019, p. 86). The settlers came to multiply their wealth, they did not understand the people living according to the cycle of nature. Everything was destroyed: childhood, family, bonds, community, work ethos, etc. The inherited trauma of the students-survivors of those schools did not allow them to regain their sense of worth and dignity. They were deprived of everything of value which had been handed down from generation to generation in that culture and tradition, with inhuman punishments for using the native language, cultivating customs, habits, garments, songs, dances, beliefs, rituals, ways of being and living. Evidence of this includes the following statements: ‘I was still afraid of what they would do to me again. After that, we waited all our lives for where the blow would come from. All my life on all fours, hunched over. School has passed, but the hunching did not’ (Gierak-Onoszko, 2019, p. 22). ‘He used to beat me and say that he was inflicting punishment on me for my sins in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, amen!’ (Gierak-Onoszko, 2019, p. 68). ‘This pain spills over to the next generation, our children have inherited it. They no longer have the strength to bear their fate. We are here on behalf of the children who have killed themselves. The death of each child weakens our community. We are like a bird that loses its feathers: they fall silently, but in the end the bird is no longer able to move and perishes.’ (Gierak-Onoszko, 2019, p. 91)

In the context of the above, we should ask: are we not currently dealing with the aforementioned phenomenon in the Russian society, which, driven by the idea of supremacy, fails to recognise Ukraine’s right to self-determination, undermines and does not recognise the Ukrainian language, the rich history of this nation, the traditions inscribed in the history and memory of Ukrainians, their values and heroes who fought for a free and independent Ukraine? Similarly, children from Ukraine are being sent to Russia with the intention to assimilate them, told that they are being rescued from the Nazis and Ukrainian nationalists.

Comparative and cross-cultural education in the face of cross-cultural and transcultural shaping of identity

Comparative and cross-cultural education should show the different possibilities of working in a multicultural environment in order to lead to the acquisition of the ability to transcend one's own ethnocentrism and sociocentrism, to understand and communicate with the Others. Meanwhile, the governments of numerous countries have abandoned the education in this area mainly to non-governmental organisations, concentrating on saving the economic, banking and military system, without noticing the disappearance of civic attitudes and the collapse of faith in democracy, in the sense of European and global solidarity, in the common good which creates dialogue and world peace. After all, as Alicja Szerłaż (2011, p. 7) emphasised '... Diversity is not just a temporary discomfort, a temporary hassle, but something permanent, something immutable that will always be'.

In the context of the above, the aforementioned sub-disciplines of education should focus on the organisation of conditions and situations supporting the fulfilment of the existential value of the three cultures creating the identity of a human being (the inherited culture of the family home and the local community, the culture acquired in state educational institutions and the individually shaped culture, i.e. the culture of needs, aspirations, aims and plans). I relate this issue to the principle of the order of the world, its existence and the continuity of a culture which shapes and liberates humans from subordination within it. Related to it is the task of meeting the need for internal and external dialogue in order to integrate these cultures in the process of human development and the groups with which we identify in the continuous process of forming individual and socio-cultural identities (Nikitorowicz, 2000, 2005, 2020).

I believe that what the multicultural Europe and the world need nowadays, is to have a tolerance for many cultures within one person, a tolerance for the new human characterised by a dynamic intercultural and transcultural identity, an individual who represents and respects many cultures in himself or herself at the same time. In one's development, the benefits from what is offered by other cultures, drawing on and borrowing from them, symmetrical exchange promotes the formation of a cross-cultural identity. 'Not cultivating the "in-between" area allows for instrumental treatment of the issue of culture (and cultures), ignorance and a return to worn-out, "out-of-date" and therefore harmful categories' (Czajka, 2012, p.13). As a result of many years of research at the Department of Cross-Cultural Education at the University in Białystok, I notice and point out the need to create

a transcultural human being who abandons a single view of the world with permanent cultural divisions.

Comparative and cross-cultural education towards the emancipation of national memories, elimination of prejudices and negative stereotypes

Comparative and cross-cultural education cannot refrain from an honest evaluation of the past, from displaying the experiences of one side and the other, from realising the importance of memory as a source of mature human reflection. Krzesimir Dębski (2016), in his search for his grandfather's grave in Kisielin in Volhynia, notes that he was met with a great silence. His grandfather, being a doctor, saved many lives, and the town was populated by Ukrainians, Poles, Russians, Czechs, Jews and Germans. The UPA soldiers had also benefited from his services. He was murdered by people driven by nationalist madness. He writes about the pincers of nationalism, communism and Nazism, about the fact that we must face the truth, work through the trauma of ethnic cleansing to allow new generations to build a national identity and pride, exonerated from the guilt of their ancestors, liberated from hostility, contempt, hatred.

Therefore, it is necessary to go back in history and show facts, statements by well-known authorities, and also to take action to eliminate the aggressive propaganda in People's Poland, the negative stereotypes formed over the years, for example, of the soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) as bandits and 'rezuns' [rezun - pl. for 'Ukrainian bandit, murderer'; translator's note]. It is our duty to present authentic accounts, experiences and experiences symmetrically. For example, the memoirs of a soldier of the UPA, Omelan Pleczeń (1991), who hid from 1947 to 1956 (nine years) in bunkers and forests in the region of Przemyśl, Sanok and Lesko. His confessions allow us to look at and interpret the problem of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in 1945-1947 in a different way, and enable us to free ourselves from the 'black hatred' shaped in the People's Republic of Poland by the repeatedly published book 'Łuny w Bieszczadach' [pl. Fires Glowing in Bieszczady]. The ancestors of this soldier had lived in this area for centuries and were exiled, which deprived them of the opportunity to return to their native lands. Mirosława Kawecka, who translated the book from Ukrainian, wrote: '...this book will not contribute to the flare-up of emotions and eternal discussions - 'who is at fault', but it will help to look at the Ukrainian side of the conflict as normal people who loved, hated and died for their motherland, and that it will contribute to filling this huge gap of alienation and resentment that

has been created between our nations in the course of the post-war years' (Płeczeń, 1991, p. 6).

I believe that the objective of these sub-disciplines of education is precisely to focus on the emancipation of national memories. Each country has the right to have its own vision of the past and to pursue a specific historical policy, however, it is essential to connect with the past, which is an important element in shaping the consciousness of citizens. In presenting our history, our identity and our national pride, we should face the facts. It is not relevant whether they are convenient for us, for our national identity. What is relevant is to not be indifferent towards them, to refrain from falsifying images from history, refrain from repeating past mistakes. On the territory of today's Ukraine, nowadays live the heirs of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth who are aware of their heritage, just as Polish citizens identify with their Ukrainian heritage in Poland. Teresa Siedlak-Kołyшко (2006) writes that they have survived and should be supported in preserving the memory of their ancestors, who settled in these lands centuries ago and feel at home. In one village, not far from Zhytomyr, residents emphasised: 'We have always been here, ma'am. My father and mother were born here, our grandparents and our ancestors were from this village, because this is where the Poles lived, this is where Poland supposedly was a long time ago. But we don't know it well, because we were afraid to talk about it, we were not allowed to...' (Siedlak-Kołyшко, 2006, p. 19). Nowadays, there are opportunities and efforts to present significant characters from these regions, which are the common heritage of Poland and Ukraine. In Kalnik, where Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz was born, a school was named after him, a small museum has been set up, and a monument of the author of the 'Fame and Glory' is located in front of the school. When analysing the biography of Karol Szymanowski, regarded as the greatest composer after Chopin, one cannot fail to notice his double Polish-Ukrainian identity (Waldorff, 1992). He was born in Tymoszkówka in 1882 on the border between Ukraine and Podolia. Juliusz Słowacki, Ignacy Jan Paderewski and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz were also connected with these lands. Karol's mother, Anna, was descended from the Taube barons, who came to the 'borderlands' [pl. Kresy; traditional name for the Eastern territories lost by Poland over the centuries; translator's note] from Livonia. The family included polonised Germans - the Blumenfelds, the Neuhauses. Gustav Neuhaus had a music school in nearby Elizavetgrad (Kirovograd), which Karol attended, and there were also Russian estates in the area.

I believe that we are ready to display our historical wisdom in order to seek agreement in the search for and representation of our shared heritage

with the Ukrainians, having a common history and cultural heritage shaped together over many centuries. The evidence thereof, among other things, is exemplified by the monument to Ukrainians and Poles, who died in July 1648 in the Battle of Machnówka. After all, on this land there lived, worked and created a common culture and history people who often had a dual sense of identity. They did not disappear, despite deportations, persecution and displacement. Their descendants still live, they point to their experiences, to the brotherhood of Poles and Ukrainians, and they now openly and without fear declare that they are of Polish origin, which once they were afraid to admit, and currently more and more people are admitting they are Ukrainians of Polish origin. The 'positive memory' and indications of the following sort are also revealed more frequently: '...even during the war, when there were Bandera's men, someone of other nationality would always warn us and save us. Similarly, during deportations to Siberia, of Poles especially, our neighbours always warned us. They supported one another' (Siedlak-Kołoszko, 2006, p. 406). 'A lot has changed for the better. We can talk freely. At Christmas we don't have to lock our doors and cover our windows to prevent someone peeping in that we are celebrating Christmas, that there is, God forbid, a Christmas tree. We can sing carols and, most importantly, talk in Polish' (Siedlak-Kołoszko, 2006, p. 410).

Comparative and cross-cultural education in creating a paradigm for the coexistence of diverse cultures

In the context of the above, I would like to draw attention to a particular challenge of comparative and cross-cultural education related to engaging in a dialogue free from propaganda, which misappropriates the thinking and attitudes oriented towards cognition, understanding, cooperation, collaboration. The challenge is to work towards eradicating the culture of cynicism, manipulation, exploitation of the trust of others, of their natural, selfless kindness, not allowing a culture of indifference, self-interest and egoism to emerge. It can be described as the challenge of bearing witness to heterologous thinking, responsibility for the Other, learning about the Other. A person perceiving and interpreting the world in a heterological manner is able to combine his or her national, state, European and civilisational citizenship and patriotism, to perceive cosmopolitanism as the idea of equal kindness towards small homelands. Is capable of giving up efforts to 'establish himself or herself' in the world, motivated by lack of reflection, egoism, actions which are temporarily pragmatic. Such a person is also able,

and I find this particularly relevant today, not to give in to obedience and super-obedience, but to represent civil disobedience (Gros, 2019).

Frederic Gros draws attention to obedience - since disobedience, in the face of the absurdity and irrationality of the world, is a given. Why do we obey, in what ways are we obedient, subservient, compliant, conformist, giving up the right to resist, not listening to the voice of conscience? He approaches the issue of voluntary obedience as a recognition of superiority, for example of the Creator, which may presuppose, as a result of this acceptance and recognition of superiority, freedom and activity. The particular problem, however, is the one of absolute obedience; unconditional, automatic, characterised by the desire to serve, linked to the worship of the leader, admiration, enchantment, fascination, etc. This is what allows the latter to hold on to power. Thus, Gros wonders how to develop the ability not to uphold the power, not to give the benefit of the doubt, not to give more than is demanded or expected, how not to be hyper-obedient but reflective, thoughtful, willing to be free and responsible for the tasks entrusted to us within the context of our own conscience.

The leading issue becomes the dialogue focused on breaking down barriers, fears, prejudices and stereotypes in a spirit of creative encounter rather than indifference or hostility. On 27th of January, 2020, during the commemoration of the 74th anniversary of the Auschwitz liberation, Marian Turski, a former prisoner of the camp, called for not being indifferent to historical lies, to stretching the historic facts for the sake of current politics. He was a teenager when the war broke out. His mother came from the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian borderland, where marching armies were constantly robbing, burning and raping. He drew attention to the phrase 'Auschwitz did not fall from the sky' and took the audience back to 1930s Berlin, pointing out the prohibitions and orders that would appear. Among others: 'Jews are not allowed to sit on these benches', 'Jews are forbidden to enter this swimming pool', 'Jews are not allowed to be members of German singing associations'. This continued to happen, slowly, until the orders and injunctions: 'Jewish, non-Aryan children are not allowed to play with German, Aryan children', 'We sell bread and food products to Jews only after 5pm'. The problem was making people accustomed - victims and oppressors and everyone else - that it was possible to exclude someone, to stigmatise them, to push this minority out of the society. He pointed out that the authorities, seeing how people slowly give in to callousness, stop reacting to evil and allow themselves to accelerate the process (banning emigration, prohibition on employment and finally sending people to ghettos). He stressed that what

had happened then could happen anywhere, and what we should defend are minority rights and the democratic order. He concluded by pointing out the need to abide by the commandment: 'Don't be indifferent. Otherwise, you won't even notice when "some Auschwitz" suddenly falls from the sky on you or on your descendants.'

Conclusion

I have highlighted the problems which both the comparative and the cross-cultural education should notice and address in contemporary conditions of cultural diversity. I associate them with the responsibility of these sub-disciplines, which stems from the basic assumptions of anthropology, its principles and values indicating the ability to see oneself in the context of others, to imagine oneself and to situate oneself in the circumstances of others. The result is orientation towards dialogue, bonds and the sense of community, responsibility for the development of the human species and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Being in relationship with others involves symbolic interactionism, constructivism, hermeneutic thought and understanding sociology. Taking, for instance, understanding and comprehension, particularly relevant to hermeneutics in my view, which is achieved through thought, reflection, negotiation, dialogue, which conditions a dignified human existence in the world (Gadamer, 2004, p. 413). This allows us to address the problems of creative communal identity, attitudes formed in this regard, of facing and resolving dilemmas of attitude in terms of representing one's own culture with dignity without demeaning others, of carrying out educational activities in this regard at the same time, responsibility for what has been ingrained in us and for the universal values of our human civilisation (Harari, 2018). This category of responsibility, as Józef Górniewicz (1997) points out, belonged to the basic canon of good human upbringing. Katarzyna Segiet (2022, p. 205) noted that nowadays responsibility is in particular demand not only in everyday life situations, but for the global world in which we exist. 'Life creates both opportunities for us to find the right offer of activity and certain threats to the current functioning of individuals, groups and communities, as well as to the projections and plans they build for the future.'

In today's world, in the conditions of liberal democracy and multicultural societies taking shape and, at the same time, numerous dangers present in this world, the problem of continuous internal (hermeneutic) dialogue seems to be the leading issue: creative activity, motivation for dialogue, continuing education, responsibility for human development and the preservation of world peace. As Stefan M. Kwiatkowski (2008, p. 7) wrote

in the introduction to his work on continuing education, 'Education and citizenship turn our attention to an upbringing society, that is, a society in which we observe the phenomenon of the overlap of education, work, social activity, politics and economics'. In this context, Irena Wojnar (2000, p. 110) calls for attention to the formation of a culture of peace, describing this challenge as one of the most important educational commitments for the 21st century. 'This issue grows to symbolic dimensions and deserves our close attention, for we have long since overcome the superficial slogans of a politicised 'struggle for peace' and are instead looking for educational ways to, in the words of C.K. Norwid, 'make peace'. Therefore, a culture of peace can be accepted as a fundamental determinant of the ethos of education in the upcoming century..'

In the context of the above, further enquiries and reflections arise regarding, for instance, the culture of patriotism, which also lie within the field of interest of the analysed sub-disciplines. Szewach Weiss (2018, p. 185) noted: 'I almost never use the word 'patriot'. I am neither a Polish nor a Jewish patriot. There has been too much patriotism in my life. It is difficult to separate it from nationalism when you pump up the balloon of patriotism. There is a nation with its religion, but there are other nations with theirs. This is connected with a certain egocentrism, personal and national egoism, with artificial pride'. I believe that it is the duty of the sub-discipline of comparative and cross-cultural education to take up the previously stated problems, as well as to try to answer the questions formulated above, especially those regarding internal and external dialogue, contemplation, reflection on the need to create mediating attitudes, eliminating prejudices and stereotypes, fears of others, suspecting others of being enemies, conspirators and a threat. Perhaps we should refer more often to Plato's 'art of intelligent conversation' or Heidegger's 'enquiry' about value and meaning, to think in a personalist and interactionist context.

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