

BALANCING CITIZENSHIP AND INTERCULTURALISM:

A comparison of two European contexts of inclusion

Abstract

The premise of this article is that unbalanced versions of inclusion politics are usually at work in European contexts. Some inclusion patterns may be more relevant for certain aspects or levels of the education system or various models may be applied to specific ethnic groups. A necessary balancing approach is discussed in this article, drawing on examples from Italy and Romania. In this article I will engage with the profile of the inclusion politics of education in two European contexts, at different levels and regarding various arenas: nationally relevant policy documents issued by the Ministries of Education in both countries, consolidated configurations of school practices and specific provisions, the profile of the inclusion message as presented in some school textbooks and teachers' guides. I will argue that at national policy level both countries are difference recognition oriented, although for different rationales and following different patterns. At a lower level, a plurality of unbalanced and differently focused versions of inclusion politics inside national contexts, frequently as one-dimensional provisions, may be noticed. Yet, a more "balanced" policy may still not be sufficient in itself. It may be, in fact, a matter of specific solutions as correcting the *status quo* in particular contexts and of multi-dimensional as substantial multicultural education to be taken on seriously in practice.

Keywords: *Politics of inclusion, interculturalism, citizenship, Romania, Italy*

Introduction

The current politics of inclusion in Europe reveal a dual pattern in the education policies endorsed by nation states, with some focusing on equal dignity and others favouring difference-driven policies (Soysal, 2002). On the one hand, the Italian pattern of inclusion confirms the relevance of a difference-driven policy, conceptualised by Maritano (2003) as an "obsession with cultural difference", in the form of intercultural education strongly focused on a superficial and excessive celebration of diversity. From a more universalistic viewpoint, this version lacks equity concerns (Mincu, 2011). On the other hand, inclusion politics may take the form of a citizenship paradigm

excessively focused on universalistic stances, downgrading differences. In this latter case, the respect and value of cultural diversity is missing, as analysed by Banks (2012) particularly with reference to the United States.

Such unbalanced models of inclusion politics may circulate as unique versions in certain national contexts at a given moment or as plural and unconnected perspectives that may coexist in the same time and place. Some of these may be more influential than others at certain points in time. This is the case, for instance, with the intercultural education paradigm in Italy over the last twenty years, which is conceptualised in terms of the recognition of cultural differences, and which proved successful in influencing school practices at a superficial and decorative level. Moreover, some inclusion patterns may be more relevant for certain aspects or levels of the education system. For example, a pattern of citizenship as individuals having equal dignity usually influences school textbooks, while intercultural education is more common in teacher education programs in both Italy and Romania. In addition, and quite emblematically, these patterns may even be applied differently to specific ethnic groups. In Romania, for instance, a policy underlining cultural difference for ethnic Hungarians, Germans and other minorities via separated educational provisions runs in parallel with an equity and citizenship version for the ethnic Roma pupils, whose cultural values and traditions are commonly undervalued and not explicitly promoted.

In addition, a consolidated tradition to consider citizenship and intercultural education as complementary and partially overlapping theories of inclusion is evident in many European contexts and in scholarship at large. Their theoretical focus and “internal ingredients” may vary widely in the views of different scholars, depending on their specific research field and interests. From the point of view of their translation in the school curriculum and as components of teacher education programmes around the globe, they come closer and become alternatives to each another. However, a thesis of a necessary “balanced theory”, which at first sight may seem as taken for granted or commonsensical, should come to the forefront of the inclusion agenda, particularly from an empirical perspective of leaving open the possibility of change. In Banks (2009) words:

“Balancing unity and diversity is a continuing challenge for multicultural nation-states. Unity without diversity results in hegemony and oppression; diversity without unity leads to balkanization and the fracturing of the nation-states” (p. 310)

In this sense, and from the specific perspective of a necessary balance between opposing poles of a continuum, a satisfactory citizenship education, upholding commonalities, rights and universal values, should include a relevant multicultural component (Kymlicka, 1995), while a balanced intercultural education, by definition focused on the recognition of differences, should include social cohesion and human rights concerns (Banks, 2009).

A significant proposal of balancing opposing perspectives has been very recently upheld by Banks (2012). In his seminal works, Banks (2009, 2012) engages with the need for balance from both poles of the continuum. He argues for the need to complement difference-driven interculturalism from an equity pedagogy perspective (2009). At the same time, and from the opposing perspective, Banks highlights the shortcomings of a universalistic approach, such as citizenship education, which lacks recognition of differences (2012). Such positions emblematically argue for a necessary balancing approach, which is further documented and discussed in this article, drawing on examples from two European contexts: Italy and Romania.

In this sense, I derive my interpretations from document analysis of policy texts such as:

- relevant key policy texts in both countries (MIUR, 2007 for Italy and the Romanian Ministry of Education Orders no.1529, 3774, 5098, 5817, the official curriculum and guidelines for developing intercultural education and human rights as elective courses);
- school textbooks (Valdissera, 2009; Bernat & Molnar, 2007; Penes, & Molan, 2004; Cuzum & Bilt, 2009)
- teacher's guides (in the Romanian case Andruszkiewicz & Prenton, 2004; Kovacs, 2004).

In this article I will argue that a more “balanced” policy may still not be sufficient in itself. It is not that the quality of inclusion will immediately and significantly become authentic through writing “balanced policy texts”, school textbooks or providing formal inclusion through mother tongue tuition, ethnic studies, superficial appeals to diversity or commonalities. It may be, in fact, a matter of specific solutions and of their practical configuration. Certain contexts may require specific solutions and theoretical perspectives correcting the *status quo*. A decorative appeal to some “cultural traditions” may be ineffective or may produce segregation, while more specific teaching strategies to support low performers or a substantial curriculum revision to propose global perspectives may be preferable. In the same vein, a balancing perspective of equity and human rights (Di Pol, 2004) may prove more useful in contexts that have been historically excessively focused on culturalist theories, while more emphasis on difference recognition may be pertinent in countries that are traditionally equity and citizenship education oriented, such as France (Lemaire, 2009).

Conceptual dichotomies in intercultural education

Although citizenship and intercultural education are seen as complementary, partly overlapping, and partly distinctive, a consolidated approach to the inclusion in education of pupils from minority or immigrant backgrounds is conceptualised as a major theoretical multi/intercultural education perspective.

Scholars in the intercultural education field have largely dealt with a fundamental dilemma: how to respect culture and differences while promoting equity in pedagogy, and avoiding the perverse effects of excessive culturalism. In response to these fundamental tensions, different approaches to multicultural education have emerged over time, some as an antidote to the risks of culturalism and to the idea of culture as innocent of class. Anti-racist education, critical multiculturalism, and equity pedagogy are viewed as potential antidotes to a differentialist paradigm or to the perverse effects of cultural difference (May, 2009). A multicultural education idea as developed by Banks (2009, p. 15) lays a great emphasis on equity pedagogy, while clearly addressing the risks of colour-blind school politics.

In some national contexts, such as Italy, the so-called “second pillar” of intercultural education, the issue of equality, is virtually lacking from the consolidated intercultural scholarship, and rarely addressed as a key focus. It is confused with an appeal to “social cohesion” (e.g., MIUR, 2007), which is a very different concept from the equity issue. In this case, equity should be recognized as major objective, but is downgraded to a mere means to an end, one possible “strategy” in implementing intercultural education. While culture comes to the forefront of the debate, the issue of class as a socio-economic dimension is strikingly absent. Our argument here is not to consider class as a more overarching dimension - “class not race” - but rather a “class *and* culture” dimension (see Appiah & Gutmann on “class and race,” 1996). In this sense, the thesis of an indispensable balance as formulated by Banks between opposing stances is a solid point of reference, which may enact into different practical configurations.

Appiah (2005, pp. 114, 119, 254) considers that abuses of “culture” and differences are an effect of an anthropological perspective on reality and therefore nothing less than a “disciplinary” prejudice. In the same vein, Bernstein (2000) warns against the “evacuation of social class” from sociological analysis. An intercultural paradigm omitting the issue of “class” and downgrading equity to a secondary issue may be considered not only rhetorical or difficult to implement. A neglected *class* or socio-economic dimension and a conflated *culture* (race) paradigm at the recognition policy level are paralleled by significant structural inequities and a lack of positive affirmative actions in schools. The Italian case may represent an example of the way a specific

policy (and focus of academic theories) proved to be pernicious, since it went in parallel with new processes of stratification and segregation in schools and society at large.

Analogous radical difference-driven policies in the name of respect for minority rights represent another unbalanced version of European interculturalism. The Romanian recognition policy of minority rights in education is a radical and separatist version. In fact, the preservation of cultural rights involved the creation of a full education system in the Hungarian minority language from primary to university level, separate from the Romanian majority. Multicultural universities in three Romanian cities teaching in German, Hungarian and Romanian are considered to be symbols of multiculturalism.

From a theoretical point of view, in order to prove its influence and efficiency, any version of interculturalism requires, among other elements, coherence between its core political message and proposed strategies of implementation (Freeden, 2000). In addition, such strategies should actually speak in some way to “reality” from a plurality of dimensions and not only from a “cultural” point of view, as is normally the case with the Italian domestic versions of interculturalism, or from a “commonalities” viewpoint, as in the case of the Roma pupils in Romania (Szakacz, 2010). This dilemma has been conceptualised in terms of redistribution versus recognition (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) and class versus race (Appiah & Gutmann, 1998). It has been considered as a “false antithesis” by Fraser (2003, p. 11) and conceptualised from the perspective of justice as “two dimensional”. In point of fact, for most scholars, a dichotomous social justice concept involves a distributional idea of Rawlsian origins versus a difference-driven concept, with the recognition of cultural and relational aspects (Vincent, 2003).

Unbalanced practical enactments: Complexities, fragmentation and incoherence

As I have shown, the need to adopt balanced versions of multi/intercultural education has been variously and strongly advocated by many scholars, not least by Banks in his seminal works. In fact, he advocated the need to complement difference-driven interculturalism(s) with more equity and anti-discrimination focused approaches, as well as to rebalance citizenship education through a defence of the ethnic studies value as a colour sensitive policy in the United States.

A consequence of his strong focus on balanced politics is that balanced models of inclusion politics should be endorsed not only on paper, but foremost on practical grounds. This implies the need to document and carefully analyse the proposed measures and solutions adopted by schools or in teacher education programmes from the point of view of “how the message will pass” and “how

substantial are the planned provisions". It goes without saying that it is not only a question of a formal, quantitative balancing.

A useful concept in intercultural/citizenship education is one that distinguishes "good" or substantial diversity and commonality ideas: a considerable and challenging infusion of diversity images in school textbooks, a consolidated way to deal with or challenge discrimination in schools, a profound transformation of the curriculum etc. From the perspective of teacher education programmes, a balanced offer may include a full package of necessary perspectives: pedagogical normative views, effective teaching methods that may focus on both the diversity category and on specific groups of pupils, cultural difference sensitivity and major universalist equity aims. Such a package will contain a plurality of substantial ingredients, relevant to diverse contexts that have had a consolidated unbalanced tradition. Such an overarching and context-sensitive paradigm may fruitfully speak to reality from a plurality of perspectives and thus become potentially challenging.

In fact, it is always a matter of what kind of interculturalism/citizenship proposal we are talking about and thus of what kind of diversity/commonality proposal is put forward. In other words, the balancing requirement should not imply just any type of diversity/commonality idea, as suggested above. It is quite puzzling and emblematic at the same time that many school actors and scholars alike believe that the mere pronunciation or recall of the words "interculturalism/citizenship" may suffice because these will automatically produce beneficial consequences. A necessary critical perspective is also needed for a competent teacher while re-proposing textbook contents that are deemed as useful tools. It may be the case that a good re-contextualisation of that information is required or that the textbook's proposal may not be of good quality: either reinforcing stereotypes or neglecting cultural issues. In addition, when I use the concept of "substantial" intercultural education as opposed to decorative or superficial appeals I follow Bank's conceptualisation of multicultural education as composed by several dimensions: "content integration, the knowledge construction processes, prejudice reduction, an empowering school culture and social structure, an equity pedagogy" (p. 15).

Two European cases: school textbooks and policy documents

In the Italian context, the education policy of inclusion is labelled "intercultural education" and dates back more than twenty years. A relevant policy document issued by the Ministry of Education in 2007 proposed a critical examination of the consequences produced so far and envisioned new ways to substantially deal with the revealed practical shortcomings. It denounced segregation and concentration phenomena, largely understudied, the risks of essentialism and

folkloristic approaches to diversity that have characterised Italian schools since the 90s. New concepts were put forward to rebalance the difference-driven profile of Italian intercultural education, through a significant emphasis on anti-racist education, anti-discrimination, and a substantial review of school curriculum content in order to generate a cross-cutting and cognitive dimension of openness. While significantly denouncing the improvisation and voluntary character of Italian intercultural measures, the document proposes the introduction of citizenship education to tackle this specific issue in the form of a necessary counterbalance.

In fact, traditional intercultural provision was translated in practice into voluntary linguistic help for immigrant students, in those schools wishing to undertake it and with appropriate finance. During the past twenty years, the most relevant practice of those schools that voluntarily adopted intercultural education was to provide some additional tuition of Italian as a second language, outside mainstream activities. Mother tongue tuition is extremely rare and sometimes supported by other countries' institutionsⁱ. In some cases, the schools may wish, when funds are accessible, to pay "cultural mediators" of different ethnic origins to facilitate communication between school and parents. Such activities are relatively piece-meal strategies, optional and heavily dependent upon availability of funds. Other symbolic celebrations of diversity may include one-off events dedicated to a folkloristic celebration of diversity, commonly on an annual basis.

The main school discipline relevant in this field is "citizenship education", recently introduced and directly related to the policy document of 2007 for the first years of primary education. In spite of its status as a compulsory school subject to be taught within the flexible modalities stipulated by school autonomy reform, teachers felt entitled not to teach it in practice, claiming a lack of preparation.

Most school textbooks do not include cross-cutting perspectives on the contemporary world and they may vary considerably from the point of view of the quality of their intercultural message. When they do so, they risk reproducing stereotyped images of diversity or poor economic conditions normally associated with the condition of immigration. For instance, school books may include diversity images, but not all of these may result in "challenging" diversity ideas. Many will not challenge inferiority perceptions, but will instead reinforce them on social and economic grounds.

An example from an Italian school text-book for the first elementary grade includes short presentations of minority origins pupils: a pupil from Sri Lanka presents their family as working in an Italian house, a Romanian student presents his father as a mason. Such examples of ethnic and minority background students reproduce stereotyped ideas about the social, professional and economic status of minority families and, peculiar to the Italian case, reinforces the idea of an

ethnic specialisation of the workforce, a reality of extreme social immobility that would require to be challenged.

In addition, relevant prejudices and commonly held images about “who is the foreigner” are not critically examined, as those regarding first and second generation immigrants. Pupils from families of foreign origin are presented as “foreign friends”, despite the fact that Italian schools include a significant percentage of second-generation immigrant pupils, which are normally exposed to Italian culture and language. The suggestions for further activities in this textbook are clearly in line with a decorative idea of pluralism: pupils are invited to bring to school the stories, music and poems of their “countries”. In addition, one of the reference textbooks for the school subject “citizenship and constitution” (Valdissera, 2009) includes extremely different areas such as affectivity education, citizenship education, intercultural education, health and nutrition education, environmental and traffic education. The space dedicated to “intercultural education” is about four pages long, with the contents above mentioned. A speedy and “abstract” approach to commonalities of another one page in the same textbook as a necessary rhetorical balance jumps immediately to conclusion in the form of a moral rule: “foreign children are not different if compared to you” (p. 21).

The Romanian context presents a rather different history. In this case, the necessity to accommodate traditional historical minorities emerged immediately in the aftermath of 1989, and continued to be perceived as a vital requirement to European integration. The nineteenth national minorities had been formally given the right to educate in their mother tongue. They may be fully educated in their native language if the local conditions allow for it (from pre-school to university) or to receive mother tongue tuition in majority Romanian schools (Law on Education, 2011). This radical promotion of the recognition of cultural difference promotes separation in the name of multiculturalism. It is extremely revealing that “ethnic studies” is provided as a school subject for the separate minority schools. Although Romanian pupils and those of other cultural origins may enrol in these ethnically defined school programs and in certain conditions the schools are more mixed than monocultural, the fact is that the official policy of recognition in this case goes along with institutional separation.

A different situation is typical of Roma pupils who learn in mainstream Romanian schools, in deprived areas and therefore in segregated contexts. They are subject to a rather different policy, that of integration (as assimilation) with the majority. In some contexts, minority-schools may become attractive schools for middle-class majority parents in search of linguistic capital. For instance, some German schools in the city of Cluj, where the majority is not native German speaking, or Hungarian schools in the capital Bucharest may represent an attractive offer for élite

majority parents. However, there may be mixed Hungarian-Romanian or Roma-Romanian schools in rural or suburban areas.

Analysing the language of the most relevant documents (Ministry Order 3774) indicates several issues that may not be helpful to communicating a clear-cut policy message. In the first place, there is ambiguity in the concept of an “intercultural society”, which is presented as a sociological reality that may be potentially realised by adopting a set of values such as tolerance, solidarity, and respect for diversity. The confusion between normative and pedagogical concepts such as the intercultural education idea with a sociological configuration, though not yet realised, it is a major source of ambiguity for school practitioners. An accurate definition of what happens in sociological terms - such as assimilation, egalitarian or non-egalitarian pluralism – may represent a more accurate description of reality and may better serve the cause of a proposed inter/multicultural education (Marger,1991). A second issue is represented by metaphorical language such as “the dialog of cultures”, which implies that the focus is on the groups and not on the individuals. Such a collective focus in the Romanian intercultural rhetoric may easily translate into such ideas as imperatives on “preservation of cultural groups” as fixed relics of a human patrimony, with the evacuation of the individual and his “own” culture and universalistic rights.

These policy texts represent an interesting case in point of a renewed emphasis on “intercultural education” as of limited importance, since it is a matter of elective courses. Schools may choose optional subjects labelled “intercultural education”, or “ethnic minority history”. This initiative may be interpreted as a trend to balance intercultural education more substantially for all pupils in mainstream schools. However, the decree imposes a revision of school textbooks in order to accommodate diversity ideas in all teaching subjects. It also requires a revision of history textbooks for secondary schools, to include and reflect the history of national minorities. This act may be seen as a step toward a more balanced intercultural education policy that may have an impact on mainstream schools. It must be borne in mind that this policy is relevant for a segment of schools, since this is an education system which continues to allow institutional separation for different minorities as a sign of multicultural recognition. The Romanian scenario is quite complex and different orientations of intercultural politics are at work for different schools and ethnic groups. If I look at the mainstream majority schools, at least on paper there are indications of a balanced idea of possible future enactments of intercultural education.

Romanian citizenship school textbooks normally include abstract images of pupils from a diversity of backgrounds, very different from the real diversity of pupils actually present in the school contexts. The abstract, unrealistic and decorative inclusion of diversity images proves to be quite inefficient on practical grounds. Quite significantly, images of Roma pupils and an inclusion

of cultural differences are usually missing, as with anti-discrimination approaches towards this minority (see Szakacz, 2010). Some intercultural education textbooks may, however, systematically engage with specific historical minorities, but more from a cognitive-informative perspective. The approach is based on the “ethnic groups” presentation, their demographic statistics and a relevant story of a historical event, or as a piece of literature for children. Informative approaches in school textbooks about other cultures, focusing on minority groups and academically-oriented content about how to “interact with each other” in multicultural situations are definitely at work, as well as a “bland <let’s appreciate diversity>” approach (Nedelcu, Iucu & Ciolan, 2011).

In sharp contrast are some teachers’ guides dealing with the overarching issue of “inclusion” (Kovacs, 2007; Andruszkiewicz & Prenton, 2007), drawing upon international collaboration. These curriculum provisions offer a wide range of practical and substantial ideas from the perspective of teaching for diversity: how to organise an inclusive learning environment, how to motive students, how to adopt a plurality of active learning methodologies. The practical examples and relevant images included are from Romanian school reality, while fundamentally dealing with equity implementation through learning methodologies and the prevention of school drop-outs.

Conclusion

What I am arguing in this article is that schools and teachers are not usually offered overarching theories of inclusions, as in Banks’ model of multicultural education, but rather specific and narrowly focused versions. Secondly, they are not provided with the full educational *repertoire* that may approximate a balanced or broadly conceived translation in practice. For instance, piecemeal and one-off solutions to a problem are still usually preferred. In the third place, policy instruments or teacher training programmes offer different and highly specialised solutions to specific inclusionary needs that in practice may be addressed in association and not in separation: different training packages and solutions for pupils from immigrant backgrounds, at risk of dropping out, and special needs pupils.

However, a more comprehensive idea such as a teaching for diversity competence has been put forward, and a more overarching approach to inclusion has emerged for those with special needs or from immigrant backgrounds, as more feasible practical tools for teachers. Such enlarged awareness of inclusionary needs is not to be understood as a shallow operational matter, completely missing the specific needs of “pupils’ categories”. “Categories” are useful in acquiring specific disciplinary knowledge and training in order to deal with specific needs, but are not to circulate in and inform school practice. The requirement is to focus on the individual and personal level as the

most relevant, and to propose solutions in heterogeneous settings (be it for immigrant language acquisition, disabled pupils or those at risk of dropping out). This is not to promote separation while undertaking positive discrimination. It has to be seen as a completely new scenario that requires a full picture of the issue of inclusion, and complex, specific arrangements and operational tools.

Both education systems given here as specific examples allow for separation: the school choice policy or the multicultural minority provisions produce segregated school on the basis of ethnicity. However, large segments of mainstream schools are still heterogeneous. A fundamental revision of the school curriculum with significant citizenship education, an enlarged historical perspective in the school history curriculum, and diversity-oriented books avoiding superficial essentialist images may all contribute to a more incisive policy tool.

I would suggest that what is required at several levels are the following ingredients: (1) a balanced policy message, drawing upon a significant difference recognition and universalist perspective and clearly posing equity as its major aim, (2) balanced teaching materials, demonstrating a full and broad engagement with the “inclusion” question, (3) availability of teachers’ guides that propose substantial and cross-cutting curriculum solutions and with less emphasis on poor-performing and at-risk students.

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ⁱ This is the case of the Romanian language and culture tuition supported by the government of this country for the Romanian children in Italy.