

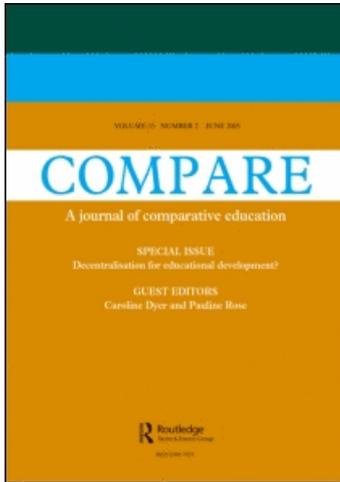
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Multi/intercultural education in Australia and the Netherlands

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In this article, the authors tease out the constructions of multi/intercultural education in Australia and the Netherlands through a comparative study of the two contexts including the population, scope of diversity, policies of multiculturalism and the policy and practice of multi/intercultural education. The comparison highlights commonalities and context-bound differences. The article then discusses some dilemmas in the practice of multi/intercultural education based on findings from the authors' recent empirical research in both countries using a critical multiculturalism framework. The dilemmas discussed include the interwoven dimensions of culturalism and individualism and the tendency towards social agnosticism among teachers and teacher education students.

Keywords: *Critical multiculturalism; Critical theories of education; Multicultural education; Intercultural education*

Introduction

During the second half of the twentieth century, multicultural and intercultural education were put on the educational agenda. African Americans in the USA challenged the dominant western view of the world in the curriculum and emphasised social justice and democracy (Banks & McGee, 1995; Hooks, 1994). In Europe, central and local authorities are interested in intercultural education as a way to 'manage' the growing ethnic and cultural diversity (Fase, 1994; Driessen, 2000; Gundara, 2000; Leeman, 2003; Van Langen & Dekkers, 2001). In Australia, multicultural education has been ongoing since the 1970s with considerable debate at the level of theory, policy and practice (Rizvi, 1987; Kalantzis *et al.*, 1990; Cahill, 1996; Secombe & Zajda, 1999).

Although there is consensus about the broad aims of multi/intercultural education, there is lack of agreement on perspectives, target groups, boundaries, dimensions and theoretical concepts within nations (cf. Banks *et al.*, 2001; Gundara,

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2000; Modood & May, 2001; Ng, 1991; Sleeter & Grant, 1987) and between nations (cf. Banks & McGee, 1995; May, 1999). Existing approaches to multi/intercultural education in different countries have been partly analysed and documented. Sleeter and Grant (1987) constructed a typology differentiating between 'teaching the culturally different', 'single group studies', a focus on 'human relations' and multicultural education in combination with a 'social reconstructionist' approach. They documented the different goals and educational aspects to which the diverse approaches pay attention. In these analyses of multi/intercultural education the focus is on the content of the curriculum. Another approach has focussed on the ideological discourses deployed by teachers in Australian schools revealing a marked tendency towards social agnosticism (Grundy & Hatton, 1995). In addition, an overwhelming focus on ethnicity alone when working with culturally diverse schooling contexts has been considered an issue in Australia (Secombe & Zajda, 1999; Tsolidis, 2001). In the USA and Canada, the degree to which multicultural education can achieve socially just outcomes has been discussed and found to be questionable (James & Schecter, 2000). Finally in the UK there has been much debate between multiculturalists and anti-racists where on the one hand multicultural education has been seen as reproducing the status quo while anti-racism challenges it, and on the other hand anti-racism has been seen as negative and ignorant of the need to celebrate diversity by focussing on structural relations (Troyna, 1992; Modood & May, 2001).

To gain understanding and scientific insight into multi/intercultural education, similarities and differences across national boundaries need clarification and analysis. Comparative studies offer the possibility to analyse and critique education from a considerable distance (see Phillips, 1999). This article compares Australia and the Netherlands, countries with different histories—one was an important colonial power while the other was colonised by the British—and somewhat marginalised in the debates put forward by colleagues in the UK and USA.

Inspired by Sleeter and Grant's (1987) 'social reconstructionist' approach to multi/intercultural education, this article argues for a reflective and democratic ethos in culturally diverse educational contexts. A social reconstructionist approach attends to struggles for the recognition of diversity within the current structures but also develops a political literacy that links these struggles to issues of wider social justice leading to social transformation. This is important since educational theory has focussed on 'managing differences' and culture has tended to be understood in terms of the 'otherness' of ethnic minority groups leading to culturalism. Culturalism is a set of ideas and practices that frame identity in such a way as to identify those of particular ethnic groups as the same and to assign characteristics that are considered by the namers as innate. Culturalism is problematic because there are differences between group and individual identities. In addition, ethnic and cultural identification is a process, not a static category (McConaghy, 1997)—culture and identity are always in a state of flux (Hall, 1987). This necessitates an understanding of power relations: identity choices are not available to all individuals

or groups equally because class, ethnic and gender stratification, objective constraints and historical factors structure them.

Theoretical focus therefore needs to be on analysis of, and reflection on, the ways in which ethnic/cultural diversity occurs in education and the possible actions and constraints—from the perspective of a reflective and democratic multiculturalism—on different levels of education. A useful way in which to do this is through an approach known as ‘critical multiculturalism’. May (1999, pp.7–8) argues that critical multiculturalism ‘incorporates post-modern conceptions and analysis of culture and identity, while holding onto the possibility of an emancipatory politics. It specifically combines multicultural/antiracist theoretical streams... It emphasises the crucial links between theory, policy and practice... And finally, it lends itself to the possibilities of a cross-national dialogue in which the differing theoretical and practical concerns of a variety of national contexts can be reflectively and reflexively explored’.

This comparative study of multi/intercultural education in Australia and the Netherlands aims to provide an insight into both the metanarratives of liberal democracies and the culture-based studies of the local context (Rust, 1991). To understand the wider national and international contexts we carried out a literature review to describe the context, politics and practice of multi/intercultural education in both countries. We have only summarised this research in the article as there is a large body from both normative and critical perspectives and we did not want to merely review that literature again preferring, instead, to focus more on the substantive issues. We start, therefore, with a general comparison of the societal context for multi/intercultural education in both countries including the population, scope of diversity and policies of multiculturalism. This is followed by an examination of the policy and practice of multi/intercultural education in the two countries. The sources we used for our comparison are key literature available in both countries, including policy documents of the central governments, reports monitoring the situation of immigrants in education, research reports and review articles into the policy and practice of multi/intercultural education. We conclude this article with an examination of critical areas at the level of the classroom.

Comparison of contexts

Immigration

In Australia and the Netherlands, multicultural and intercultural education entered the educational agenda in relation to immigration after the Second World War. Today both countries have similar populations of around 19 and 17 million respectively. Both are ethnically diverse and reveal tensions emanating from inequitable social relations. These inequities result from problems related to integration in a new society, language, religious and cultural differences and the exclusion of immigrants—and in the case of Australia, the Indigenous peoples.

Differences also exist between the Netherlands and Australia. Post-war immigration to the Netherlands consisted of labour migrants from the south of Europe, Turkey and Morocco. People came from the former colonies of Suriname and

Indonesia (which had special relationships with the Dutch and the Dutch language) and refugees came from all over the world. A large portion of immigrants arrived (in the 1960s and 1970s) as guest workers to fulfil labour contracts with the intention of returning to their country of origin; in practice, they stayed. The Netherlands did not have an elaborated or long-term immigration policy because of the ideological hegemony of temporary migration; policy formation was ad-hoc (WRR, 1979). When the economic situation brought a period of unemployment in the early 1980s, a policy of 'closed borders' was formulated and included the possibility of family reunion for labour migrants, intake of political refugees and special regulations for immigrants from the former colonies. Immigration has become a permanent flow and is, in effect, difficult to control (CBS, 2002; Dagevos *et al.*, 2003).

In comparison, Australia has been a 'settler society', with immigration policies in place prior to Federation. In 1865 for example, the colony of New South Wales passed legislation restricting Chinese immigration (Collins 1991). Later, as a nation-building priority, the Federal Government introduced the *1901 Immigration Restriction Act*, subsequently known as the 'White Australia' policy. Similar policies can be found in the histories of other 'New World' countries such as Canada, New Zealand and the USA (Collins, 1991). This was the period during which Australia and other New World countries created images of homogeneity when indeed they never were, all had Indigenous populations. Australia has not had 'labour' migrants or guest workers, but like the Netherlands it is witnessing increasing numbers of refugees and there is an indication that a 'labour migrant' category may be introduced by the current conservative Federal government.

Today in Australia, first and second generation immigrants make up 40% of the population: one in four Australians were born overseas with 14.2% born in non-English-speaking (NES) countries. Among children, 15% over five-years of age speak a language other than English. The change in linguistic diversity is significant given that in 1947, 81% of the overseas-born population were from English-speaking countries whereas in 1997, only 39% were from English speaking countries (figures from Jonas, 2001).

Immigrants and their descendants can be found across all social classes, but it is the more recently arrived who tend to cluster in areas of high unemployment. During the 1980s, immigrants came mainly from Vietnam and Lebanon, escaping political persecution and war. These two groups remain among the most disadvantaged, although there appears to be some differentiation in relation to religious affiliation. For example, according to the 1996 Census, Muslims from the Middle East and North Africa are found among the more disadvantaged whereas Christian Lebanese are less so. Muslims in general have a 25% unemployment rate compared to a national rate of 9% (Australia Bureau of Statistics 1996). The 1990s saw a shift in Australia's immigration pattern, with more immigrants coming from Asia, whereas previously Europe had been the main source of new-comers. Six categories in the top ten are now from Asian countries, with the UK and New Zealand still at the top of the list. They, and South Africa, are the only English-speaking countries in the list (Department of Immigration, 1999). Over this period the

conservative Federal Government has tightened its immigration policies, and attitudes and practices towards refugees are becoming harsher.

In terms of educational outcomes, results vary. Cahill (1996) found that children of immigrants generally do quite well in the Australian education system, some groups out-performing the dominant 'Anglo' majority. However, other groups, such as refugees from Vietnam and the Middle East, generally do not do as well. There are connections here to wider policies of immigration, which in Australia targets people with social, economic and cultural capital such as the ability to speak English. The 'points test'—an inventory of characteristics required to gain entry—targets cultural capital and this tends to override factors related to ethnicity.

Dutch policies on immigration have become increasingly part of the highly restrictive European Community policies. Immigrants differ from each other and from the majority 'Dutch' along religious, linguistic, colour and ethno-cultural lines. Immigrants differ in official status and in rights for settlement. At the start of the new millennium, 17.5% of inhabitants of the Netherlands were born, or had at least one parent who was born abroad. Of these, half originate from other western countries like Germany. The rest, the so-called 'ethnic minorities', come predominantly from Turkey (21.9%), Morocco (18.6%) and Suriname (21.5%) (CBS, 2002). There are also spatial dimensions to settlement with concentrations of ethnic minorities in the Randstad, the area in the west of the Netherlands where Amsterdam, Utrecht, The Hague and Rotterdam are situated. In these cities almost half of the youngsters are part of ethnic-cultural minorities.

The position of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands today reveals that relatively new groups of immigrants are still situated in the lower socio-economic strata. Relatively, their unemployment rate is high, level of education low and housing conditions poor (Dagevos *et al.*, 2003), although there is some differentiation between and within the different ethnic minority groups. Recent research (Tesser, 2003) shows that ethnic minorities, especially those educated in the Netherlands are making progress in their schooling to the extent that some are closing the gap between ethnic minority and majority performance. There are special priority policies aimed at equal opportunities for and integration of ethnic minorities. Whether these policies are effective is highly debated (see Dagevos *et al.*, 2003).

In conclusion, each country's population has a different composition with the percentage of immigrants considerably higher in Australia. Immigration policies of both countries are increasingly similar, although their histories differ. Australia has a longer immigration history and consequently more experience with attempting to manage cultural difference. The Australian image is western and English speaking. It is an image of the people that immigrated to Australia, particularly from the late nineteenth century; it is not the image of the Indigenous people. The most recent discussions on immigration started during the second-half of the twentieth century and involve immigrant and Indigenous communities. In the Netherlands, multiculturalism is at the margin of a discussion focussed on integration, a discussion in which the ethnic minorities, as newcomers, are relatively silent.

Conceptualisation of difference

In the Netherlands, the use of the dichotomy autochtoneous (Dutch descent)—allochtoneous (descent from abroad) is very popular in circles of the dominant ethnic groups, in both media and politics. The majority see immigrants as culturally different. Opinions about difference change over time. For example, in the early days of post-war immigration, the Dutch saw Italian, Spanish, Turk and Moroccan migrant workers as very different. Nowadays, Italy and Spain are part of the European Union and are not seen as that 'foreign'. In relation to this difference, religion—Christian/Islam—poses another strong dichotomy. Social psychologists show that the current general ethnic hierarchy in the Netherlands puts Moroccan and Turkish people most socially distant from 'the Dutch' (Oudenhoven *et al.*, 1998). The 'black' Surinamese and Antilleans are in the middle. Some immigrant groups downplay their difference and are moving (in their aspirations and partly in their positions) in the direction of the mainstream; others feel excluded and tend (in reaction) to emphasise ethnic cultural differences.

The frequently used Dutch dichotomy autochtoneous/allochtoneous—to give, in a nutshell, a description of the dichotomy of power and difference, this distinction, however, does not exactly fit the Australian case. Australia has a history of excluding people based on colour—both immigrants and the local Indigenous peoples—and the 'White Australia' policy was not formally removed until 1972 (Collins, 1991). Furthermore, the black–white dichotomy used in the US is not precise enough for the Dutch situation, nor does it help in understanding the Australian context. Colour has been an important dimension of discrimination in Australia, particularly in relation to Indigenous peoples, but also Asians, Pacific Islanders and more recently those from the Middle East. In addition to these dichotomies of Christian/Muslim and immigrant 'other'/'real' Australian, is the problematic place of Indigenous Australians. There is overwhelming resistance by Indigenous Australians to being seen as 'just another ethnic group', due to the initial dispossession of land and social marginalisation, and while only small in number (350,000), Indigenous Australians mobilise considerable moral and ethical force in their claims. Therefore the dimensions of power and difference are multiple/overlapping and shifting in Australia and relate to both the legacies of colonialism and the changing dynamics of immigration.

In conclusion, there seems to be a range of interethnic differences connected with a social hierarchy operating in both countries. What is consistent across both contexts is a cultural form of racism (culturalism). Indeed in both countries, this culturalism seems to be increasingly focussed around religious difference. The situation in Australia is made even more complex considering the position of the Indigenous peoples.

National policies of multiculturalism

In the Netherlands, the descriptive term 'multicultural society' is generally accepted; however few favour the idea of multiculturalism as an ideal societal form. This is

because multiculturalism is an ideologically 'loaded' term that gives value to cultural diversity. Emphasis is on integration and the participation of immigrants in the central institutions of society. Multiculturalism was never an important policy subject. In the Dutch liberal way of thinking, core values of freedom of opinion (for example affected in the free expression of cultural and religious beliefs) and individual autonomy guarantee cultural rights. There is minimal attention at the national level on special cultural privileges or for the languages of immigrants as the focus is on integration and openness to diversity at the individual level. At this level, individual agency is captive to the 'law of the market' ideology, which dictates that the strong and integrated will succeed. Such an approach to policy makes immigrants who are not successful a 'problem'; they appear as 'culturally hand icapped'. The consequences of this approach for social cohesion are growing geographical segregation along the lines of ethnicity that emerge in poor areas of big cities, with increasing socio-economic disparity along ethnic lines. In the changing and hardening political climate, loyalty to the Netherlands and acceptance of the Dutch system are important themes. Mutual respect was always an essential feature and thus is an integrationist model.

There is some parallel between Dutch and Australian policies. While group cultural rights are respected, the constitution concerns itself with individual rights over any collective rights. Multiculturalism in Australia has three essential features (Jonas, 2001, pp. 5–6):

- Loyalty to Australia
- Acceptance of the Australian system
- Mutual respect

It tends therefore to be mainly liberal in approach by promoting loyalty to Australia first but allowing for the expression of cultural beliefs and values within the law. There is still the notion that immigrants create problems, particularly those seen as most 'alien' such as people of colour and different in terms of religion. The irony is however, that although collective rights are not recognised because of the hegemony of individualism, this does not stop ethnicity becoming a marker and explanation to justify essentially racist constructions of difference. For example, youth gangs are criminalised and ethnicised by police and the media in Sydney. That is, they are seen as criminal gangs and their ethnicity is identified (before proof) (Collins *et al.*, 2000). From the perspective of anti-racists this is an outcome that could be expected of a form of multiculturalism which has focussed too much on the cultural maintenance of the 'Other', thus producing bounded notions of identity, and not enough on challenging the status quo, which would reveal relations of power shaping identity (Rizvi, 1987).

These recent tensions are set against a background of increased conservatism where special programmes for immigrants have been reduced or stopped. While multiculturalism as policy and practice is integrationist in approach, it nevertheless provided focussed support. 'Mainstreaming'—the end of specific migrant group targeting of special provisions and the expectation that these will be taken up more

generally in the provision of services to the wider community—has been evident since 1996 when the new right-wing Howard Government abandoned multiculturalism as a policy, and dispersed the Department of Multicultural Affairs (Noble & Poynting, 2000). Leading up to the Centenary of Federation in 2001, the question of what it meant to be Australian arose and, along with it, what a revised constitution would look like if Australia became a Republic. This questioning included concerns about religion, language and individual versus collective group rights. There was some comparison made with Canada's *Bill of Rights* but fear of creating 'many nations within' halted the debate. The Republic referendum was lost. Since then, treatment of asylum seekers landing on Australian shores, ethnicisation of youth crime and the rise of conservative Christian groups have meant that multiculturalism is seen as a threat to social cohesion and national identity.

In politics then, multiculturalism in both countries is associated with 'problems' or the management of 'potential problems'. Orthodox liberals defend liberalism against a politics of difference represented by multiculturalism. Only neutrality of the civic realm can ensure personal autonomy, equality and common citizenship. Both research and policy focus on 'the problematic immigrant'. In education, in both countries, the bulk of research is concerned with immigrant children and social mobility (Leeman & Volman, 2001; Cahill, 1996, p. 15). In Australia, research discusses the contribution immigrants have made to the country (see Collins *et al.*, 1995), their experiences of racism and exclusion (Castles *et al.*, 1998), educational and social experiences of ethnic minority female students (Tsolidis, 2001) and the school experiences of ethnic minorities (Smolicz, 1971). Research into the realities (positive and negative) of people living in a multi-ethnic-cultural context is less abundant.

Australia in a moral sense finds it difficult to defend a western image in the face of the Indigenous peoples' struggles and a highly diverse society. Consequently, discussion is highly politicised. In the Netherlands, until recently, multiculturalism was not a highly important political issue; the majority of the population was somewhat indifferent to the issue. The elections in Spring 2002 brought considerable change. Pim Fortuyn put the problems of multiculturalism high on the agenda, and was supported by almost 20% of voters. Since then there has been considerable change in Dutch policies. Multiculturalism has now been abandoned and the idea of assimilation—'fitting in' and the concomitant denial of difference—is gaining ground. Ethnic minority groups don't have significant political power and lack unity, discouraging development of a critical counterforce.

Policy and practice of multicultural and intercultural education

There is a minor differentiation between the terms multicultural education and intercultural education: both multicultural and intercultural education aim to provide language support to immigrants and to improve relations between immigrants and non-immigrants. However, Australian multicultural education has always included an anti-racist element, in part due to the Australian history of discrimination on the basis of race, but also because Australia adapted the Canadian approach to multicultural policies and practices.

Dutch educational policy, being mainly integrationist, focusses on opportunities for immigrants to enable them to participate in the institutions of Dutch society (including teaching Dutch as a second language) *and* on intercultural education—a kind of citizenship education for all in the multicultural society (Fase, 1994; Leeman, 2003). Since the 1970s school regulations insist teachers pay attention to intercultural education—that immigrants as well as the Dutch have to change in order to co-exist in a multicultural society. Mutual respect and tolerance are important goals of intercultural education (Ministerie van OenW, 1981).

However, the content and pedagogies of intercultural education are not officially prescribed. Schools and teachers have considerable freedom in the way they bring intercultural education into practice and ‘freedom of education’ is an important characteristic of the school system (Van Langen & Dekkers, 2001; Vermeulen, 2004). Intercultural education is not a priority subject and this would be difficult to achieve since although all schools are state funded, they differ along religious and pedagogical lines. For example, there are now more than 30 Islamic primary schools within the state system. The policy recommended that there be no fixed timetable for intercultural education and no special subject area in the curriculum; it was to be integrated across all curriculum areas. In principle all teachers have responsibility and ownership. Here it is important to remember that in the Netherlands there are almost no immigrant teachers (Visser & Theunissen, 1998), so critical perspectives on intercultural education and views of the world from an immigrant perspective are not easily included. Unlike countries such as the UK, intercultural education is not highly contested (Modood & May, 2001). Immigrant groups do not fight for social justice through intercultural education. It is part of the policy of the Department of Education and part of the struggle of democratic workers in education.

In practice different schools have different lessons. In ethnically diverse schools, there is a practice of intercultural education, an emphasis on relevant content for all and on ensuring a safe and encouraging school climate. Research (Projectgroep Intercultureel Onderwijs, 1995) shows that intercultural education is very weak in ‘all white’ schools and has not entered the mainstream educational debate, nor succeeded in positioning itself as a relevant issue for both—immigrants and the majority.

In Australia, since the late 1970s, multicultural and Indigenous education have been tied to sometimes-parallel concerns, especially in terms of social exclusion and racism. To this end, multicultural education was largely concerned with language acquisition for the immigrant and anti-racist practices in schools and classrooms. Multicultural education had a focus on the maintenance of culture—for the immigrant—and was embedded in policy at the national, state and departmental levels of education. Debunking myths about Indigenous peoples through curriculum vehicles such as Aboriginal Studies was also introduced in the early 1980s. In addition, there have been various forms of ‘perspectives’ approaches—whereby a multicultural or Indigenous perspective was added on to curriculum areas—as well as community language programmes and lessons on tolerance and respect for all.

The focus of policies and practices during the 1970–1980s was on access to the mainstream via equality of opportunity. Thus, the idea was to provide space for

cultural difference but in an instrumentalist way. This was one of Troyna's (1992) criticisms of multicultural education policy in England: that multicultural education was about managing difference rather than transforming social structures. Since the national policy in Australia was axed in 1986 due to budgetary constraints and the subsequent mainstreaming of many programmes, the idea of a 'culturally inclusive curriculum' has developed which is less ethnicised and more focussed on intersections of ethnicity, gender, class and other social relations. Programmes for English have been seriously cut back providing only short-term support for immigrant children in schools. There has also been a fragmentation of the state education system alongside an increase in the number of private schools, particularly in terms of religion. There is now a nationally-backed 'Community Harmony' programme which funds small community-based initiatives that focus on co-operation and dissolving difference around the theme of 'you+me=us'. Individual states have their own policies and thus policy and practice has, like the Netherlands, become less centralised. Paradoxically, this has occurred at the same time that assessment has become more centralised through mass testing. This means that there is tension created by the demands of testing regimes, on which teachers' performances are assessed, and the need for local, contextualised responses.

Multicultural and Indigenous education are still separate policy areas. Indigenous education is highly politicised with organisations at local, national and international levels providing input into policy and producing curriculum materials. Initially, Indigenous education policy directed practice towards a two-fold objective: historical and structural explanations of contemporary inequalities and teaching 'about' Indigenous cultures. Currently the curriculum centres on integration of perspectives across the curriculum at primary level, a mirror of the long-term practice of multicultural education. In secondary schools there is a separate elective subject.

Like the Netherlands, practice in multicultural education varies depending on the diversity of the school context and the interest of the teacher. While individual teachers determine the content of multicultural lessons, citizenship studies have recently been added to the curriculum as a space for exploring rights and responsibilities. In contrast to the Netherlands, one out of five teachers in Australia responding to a survey stated that they were born overseas or came from a Non-English Speaking background and 0.8% of teachers were Indigenous (Australian College of Education, 2001). The effects of this difference in the teaching population have not been researched.

Thus, in the context of liberal policies on multiculturalism in both countries it is possible to see a number of similarities: multi/intercultural education is a pedagogical enterprise that predominantly involves lessons in tolerance for all. In both countries there is room to incorporate anti-racism although only in Australia is this made explicit. However, anti-racism is often seen as too negative and not treated unless there is an 'event' such as name calling or violence that requires a response. In both countries the schools are expected to provide multi/intercultural education, but not as a special subject area, the exception being Aboriginal Studies in Australia. In general then, multi/intercultural education in both countries has no strong position,

is difficult to control and depends on a predominantly mainstream teaching force to give it content and shape.

Differences between the countries relate to the rejection of multicultural education by Indigenous peoples in terms of their own struggles and prior occupation of the Land, and the fact that multicultural education is seen as something done for immigrants. In the Netherlands it is a separate issue, but only teachers in schools with a high percentage of immigrants are interested. In Australia, the debate was highly politicised until recently; the new trend in Australia towards non-tolerance, despite the rhetoric of government, has silenced this issue. In the Netherlands intercultural education is seen as important for mutual respect and as helpful for integration, but indifference is evident in schools. This probably relates to a perceived lack of relevance to Dutch culture; a sense of relevance that, due to a history of immigration, is part of the Australian culture.

Thus, we can see that contexts shape practical concerns. This is made clearer when we look at Australia and the Netherlands and then compare them with the international situation. While Australia has always included anti-racism in multicultural education for example, the UK keeps the two separate. Australia's 'White Australia' Policy (discontinued in 1967) has produced ideological legacies that require deconstruction and anti-racism provides this platform through a concentration on the origins of racialised thinking and the history of racialised practices in Australia. In the US more black teachers are employed to promote multicultural education. This strategy has, to some extent, also been used in Australia in relation to Indigenous teachers. Canada and New Zealand also have multi/intercultural education and, like Australia, separate Indigenous education policies. But once again, the Maori in New Zealand and First Nations in Canada tend more towards separatist policies and practices than Indigenous peoples in Australia (Reid, 2004, pp. 41–42). Canada also must wrestle with the question of Quebec and the French language.

Generalisable multi/intercultural education policies and practices are therefore not a way forward because of different contexts and histories. These different contexts and histories require local responses rather than a reliance on generic 'toolkits' that often result in simplistic practices that tend towards culturalism. In our final section we examine culturalism in terms of the form/s it takes in classroom practice and its effects on students, as well as examining the relationship between culturalism and individualism. In examining the effects of culturalism we will demonstrate the ways in which cultural boundary making closes off possibilities while individualism denies social and cultural difference. In these examples we also demonstrate the tendency for teachers and teacher education students to be socially agnostic.

Multi/intercultural education in the classroom

To conclude this article, we examine critical areas at the level of the classroom. In both countries there has been little research into the daily practice of multi/intercultural education or the perspectives of the participants. Our recent research shows that culturalism frequently occurs in classrooms (Leeman, 1997, 1998; Leeman & Volman, 2001; Reid, 1999, 2001, 2003). For example, in Australia, a

study involving four focus groups of Aboriginal students [n=26] across different levels of a Sydney secondary school, and focus group discussions with their teachers, illuminated the problems associated with culturalism (Reid, 1999, 2001). For example, in policy materials, curriculum documents and in the discourses of teachers, urban Aboriginal youth had been pathologised as having low self-esteem because they had 'lost' their culture. The development of self-esteem through school-based activities was a major focus of Aboriginal Studies. Much of the curriculum was historical and environmental but there was also a focus on culture aimed at Aboriginal students. The problem with much of the cultural material was that there was a slippage from 'textbook' traditional Aboriginal society to the urban context. This revealed itself in ways that students found objectionable. For example, students objected strongly to having 'traditional Aboriginal culture' imposed in the form of traditional 'bushtucker' and the wearing of the highly political Aboriginal colours of resistance (red, black and yellow) in the clothing of the Aboriginal Education Assistant at their school. They were more interested in African American rap clothes, while at the same time coming to understand family history. Students revealed a strong sense of identity and belonging rather than a lack of self-esteem, which Griffiths (1993) has in fact argued has more to do with achievement. Problems of racism, sexism and poverty were seen to be more urgent than learning 'how to be Aboriginal'. The reliance on victim discourses in relation to Aboriginal students also led to a containment of dynamic identity processes and therefore a potential removal of agency.

In the Netherlands, immigrant pupils did not voice this criticism. Awareness of the problems associated with culturalism led the Dutch Ministry of Education to launch a project into new ways of operationalising intercultural education. The *Intercultural Learning in the Classroom* project involved teachers across all education sectors collaborating in sector networks on the development of intercultural activities and experimenting with them in the classroom. Teachers were asked to develop examples of intercultural activities in which culturalism was avoided and which could easily be used by other teachers in their daily classroom activities. Researchers evaluated the lessons on intercultural education developed by the individual teachers participating in the project (Ledoux *et al.*, 2001; Leeman & Ledoux, 2003a, 2003b), and analysed the teacher curriculum documents, which were the end products of the four sector networks. Teachers were asked to document their objectives, content, didactic approach and the competencies required of pupils and teachers for intercultural education. In addition, the researchers observed lessons and discussed them with the teachers (in a reflective way) to gain an impression of classroom practice. One conclusion was that the teachers moved away from culturalism and focussed more on individual differences of age, religious orientation and lifestyle than on ethnic differences. Only in ethnically-mixed classrooms were ethnic differences prominent. Teachers saw intercultural education mainly as education for tolerance, emphasising the necessity of a safe atmosphere in the classroom, and competencies to promote this. According to the teachers, these competencies include empathy and communication skills.

A focus on the individual, or providing opportunities to discuss the personal, does not take account of the political—such as factors shaping education and educational policy (Young, 2000). Indeed group differences related to power imbalances in society seem to be no part of the repertoire of teachers in the Netherlands and teacher education students in Australia. A study by Reid (2000), revealed that teacher education students rejected critical approaches of theory and restated their desire to learn about ‘how’ to teach students of difference. In this study, the analysis of four focus group discussions with students and on-line discussion material involving 125 participants over a 3-month period revealed that developing reflexivity is often rejected in favour of a safe, non-threatening approach. This safe approach to understanding and dealing with difference has a focus on the peculiarities of the ‘Other’ and tends to obscure the external referent culture. Difference is seen as something to be harnessed, co-opted and incorporated to achieve cultural compatibility. The pedagogy of bringing into the centre—‘us’—reveals the essential paradox of liberalism. That is, it ‘tolerates diversity only as an instrumental quality and not as something valuable in itself’ (Griffiths, 1993, p. 309).

These studies reveal the links between liberalism at the wider social and political levels and the way in which the structures of society are left unexamined in favour of approaches that focus on culture as an explanation for inequality and difference. Multi/intercultural education is therefore complicit in maintaining the status quo if wider socio-political processes that produce ‘difference’ are not examined and revealed. In a critical multicultural approach to education, issues of identity and nation become central to analysis and to multi/intercultural education. If we are to avoid culturalism and/or a focus only on decontextualised individuals, then a new strategy for multi/intercultural education is needed and teacher competencies need to be re-oriented. At a time of transnational migration a ‘new racism’ has emerged which is related to how national identity is understood in terms of who belongs and who doesn’t. Short and Carrington (1999) argue that we need to understand this new racism and consider how it might relate to a critical multicultural pedagogy. They argue that children make quite complex observations and explanations about these identities leading them to suggest that the task of schools might be to harness these understandings and deconstruct them so that they can recognise and challenge racist folklore such as ‘immigrants and/or multiculturalism is a threat to social cohesion’. Perhaps the main thrust of critical multiculturalism in terms of pedagogy is that conflict in society should be addressed rather than ignored. Sometimes this means that a safe environment cannot be guaranteed because voicing misconceptions is unsettling.

Comparative studies provide opportunities to examine examples of contextualised dilemmas revealing the limitations to individualistic responses to culturalism in the Netherlands and the reaction of the Aboriginal Australian students to culturalism. In this way, teachers come to see different contexts between countries and within countries and consequently, that ‘recipes’ are of little use. However, to see international trends and to gain insight into local interpretations a highly comparative educational theory is needed. Comparative studies that are grounded

in theory and practice provide impetus for reflection and thus develop reflective and reflexive teachers.

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