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From monocultural to intercultural ways of thinking on integration and development of education

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This paper outlines different contextual factors for the educational activities of schools with focus on multicultural and intercultural development. The number of people with foreign backgrounds in general and newly arrived people, in particular, is linked to the form of system of meaning that benefits their education and integration. The starting point and the content of the paper is based on extensive practical experience of development of education as well as recent research in that field. The purpose of the paper is to provide the educational staff with concepts and systems of thinking, or rather, systems of meaning, which help them analyze, understand and change the thinking that prevents the development of education and society to be based on diversity.

Education – an important area for integration

Integration and inclusion into the Swedish society is the central goal of all education activities as stated in governing documents. The importance of the education as an arena for integration is beyond competition. The education in general brings together all children, adolescents and adults, regardless of their background, ethnicity and religion. In addition, according to the governing documents, the education is to provide all students with an education equivalent to that of pupils with Swedish background. Integration of newly arrived students is therefore discussed and related to different systems of meaning that I call monocultural, multicultural and intercultural, as well as their consequences for school policy and development. The purpose is to describe a contextual framework for different ways of thinking or systems of meaning, and for the various educational activities and actions that this article contains.

Integration as a concept is usually used in organizational and societal contexts when discussing ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. Integration is a value-added and powerful concept because it underlies various political measures for development in the nation and in the municipalities. Integration is therefore also an ambiguous and problematic concept that needs to be described and contextualized to create an understanding of the problems and dilemmas associated with the pedagogical task of the education in regards to inclusion, equal educational possibilities and success for all students.
The meaning of integration is "a process that leads to unification of different entities" (Nationalencyklopedin), but in practice there are different ways of defining integration. The official integration policy applies to all activities in Sweden and is formulated in the government’s document Egenmakt mot utanförskap – regeringens strategi för integration (Regeringens Skrivelse 2008/09, s. 24). Four overall objectives of the integration policy are highlighted:

1. Equal rights and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic and cultural background,
2. A social community built with diversity as a basis,
3. A development of society characterized by mutual respect for differences within the boundaries of society’s fundamental democratic values and for which everyone must be involved and responsible for, regardless of their background, and
4. A society free from discrimination.

Ethnic integration, however, is problematized and debated both in research and in media. Aytar (2009) claims, based on research on integration, that despite changes in the official integration policy, according to which integration is perceived as a (mutual/reciprocal) process in a society characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity, there is still a predominance of "integration-promoting activities" aiming at adapting minorities to the majority society (Aytar, 2009). The attitude of the majority society towards the integration of different minorities affects the work done by the schools in regards to the opportunities of minorities and newly arrived pupils to inclusion, equivalence in education, and performance at school. The following attitudes, or systems of meaning, are therefore described in this chapter: mono-, multi- and intercultural. They serve as analytical instruments and as a reference framework for the education to receive and accept its mission, create the required room to maneuver, acquire status and develop its practices.

**Mono-, multi- and intercultural integration and school development**

It can be problematic to use the trichotomy of mono- multi and intercultural integration as if they were exclusive and as if it were possible separate them from each other. These different types of integration thinking can be active simultaneously with regard to different aspects or different staff at the school depending on their education or role. However, it can be fruitful to systematize thinking and construction of meaning into a pattern where different assumptions, perceptions, beliefs, and practical approaches are described coherently in order to analyze and change them. It is especially important to understand the systems of meaning that prevents schools from achieving an educational development based on diversity. Of course, the number of newly arrived pupils with foreign background affects the identity that a school has created and how the school in turn handles pupils with foreign background. If the school does not have so many newly arrived student or other students with foreign background, it is understandable that the school is more monocultural in its systems of meaning, or vice versa, if the majority of school students are foreign born, it leads to a more multi- or intercultural system of meaning regarding school identity, development of competence, activities and practical educational work.
Monocultural integration

A monocultural approach implies that it is desirable that, for example, schools and educational systems create similarity, "Swedishness" and people equal value systems, through assimilation (Lahdenperä, 2009). These ideas are based on ethno-nationalistic thinking, which means that it is good for the country to consist of one people, one religion, one language, one system of values, etc. This is also known as ethnocentrism, that is, a tendency to see the own culture as superior while holding degrading attitude towards what is perceived as different, usually going hand in hand with, and reinforcing ethno-nationalistic thinking.

Public schools have by tradition been responsible for education and citizenship, i.e. the socialization of pupils into society and the creation of the citizen with a uniform culture as a model (Lahdenperä 2010, Lorentz 2007). Andy Green (1997) summarizes the content of citizenship education as separate processes for constructing the nation-state: 1) creating state-citizens, 2) creating an official language, 3) establishing state laws and regulations, and 4) building a national identity. In the light of this description, it becomes the task of the Swedish educational system to shape the citizen of Sweden with “Swedishness” as the point of departure and as the norm.

In the monocultural school, diversity and multiculturalism can be treated as an immigrant or minority problem involving schools with a large proportion of children who are themselves born or have parents born abroad. Furthermore, in the monocultural school, action is taken against minorities and newly arrived for compensatory purposes to assimilate them in the majority society, where the emphasis on the Swedish language and focus on the mistakes and shortcomings of pupils and parents are at the focus of the measures taken and the education given. The members of minority groups are expected to leave their cultural identities in the private sphere or to be subject to various assimilation measures of "Swedishness", for example, through courses and education. The aim of the measures is to make pupils with a foreign background be and act as Swedes.

This assimilation thinking becomes evident in how language development is viewed, here learning Swedish is the central problem and the aim of education. Concerns that the student cannot speak enough Swedish or does not have a Swedish-speaking background is the focus of the school's educational measures. In this monocultural and monolingual thinking, students with a foreign background can be considered as a problem with deficiencies that need to be addressed, reversed and solved. Particularly worrying is that these students may be different, have different values, different conditions at home, speak a different language at home, etc. The construction of this differentness is based largely on a ‘We’ and ‘Them’ thinking, where we Swedes behave the same, unlike the others, who also behave in the same way as each other due to their strangeness, to being immigrants, outsiders or other aspects that make them so different (Lahdenperä 2010, 2015). Mother tongue education, which is for the ‘Others’, is considered as a barrier and competitor for learning Swedish because it takes students’ teaching time and interest.

A monocultural and ethnocentric thinking can result in students with foreign backgrounds being considered as ‘newly Swedish’ pupils with the same needs and possibilities as students
with Swedish backgrounds without taking regard to the special rights, difficulties and needs of individualization. Some will even be proud to regard all students as equal (Lahdenperä 2015; Lund & Lund 2016). The background of pupils lacks meaning in this monocultural thinking, which is something that I have witnessed in new school leaders that are unaware of their incompetence in matters of diversity and multilingualism (Lahdenperä 2015, 2016).

**Multicultural integration**

The concept of *diversity* has since 2010 been implemented in connection with various state investigations based on the idea of civic nationalism, that is, nationalism and the understanding of a Swedish national identity built more on linguistic and cultural similarities than on common genes. This kind of nationalism based on a civil or cultural identity is often described as civic nationalism. All different institutions and organizations in Sweden are obliged to have a *plan for equal treatment*, based on the aspects of diversity identified in the Discrimination Act, ie gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, disability, sexual orientation or age. Discrimination of individuals or groups is, in Swedish law, a violation of the principle of equal treatment. The Discrimination Act (2008: 567) Section 4 provides the following definitions of discrimination:

1. **Direct discrimination**: that someone is disadvantaged by being treated less favorably than someone else is treated, has been treated or would have been treated in a comparable situation, if this disadvantaging is associated with sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.
2. **Indirect discrimination**: that someone is disadvantaged by the application of a provision, a criterion or a procedure that appears neutral but that may put people of a certain sex, a certain transgender identity or expression, a certain ethnicity, a certain religion or other belief, a certain disability, a certain sexual orientation or a certain age at a particular disadvantage, unless the provision, criterion or procedure has a legitimate purpose and the means that are used are appropriate and necessary to achieve that purpose.
3. **Inadequate accessibility**: that a person with disability is disadvantaged through a failure to take measures for accessibility to enable the person to come into a situation comparable with that of persons without this disability where such measures are reasonable on the basis of accessibility requirements in laws and other statutes, and with consideration to • the financial and practical conditions, • the duration and nature of the relationship or contact between the operator and the individual, and • other circumstances of relevance.
4. **Harassment**: conduct that violates a person’s dignity and that is associated with one of the grounds of discrimination sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.
5. **Sexual harassment**: conduct of a sexual nature that violates someone’s dignity.
6. **Instructions to discriminate**: orders or instructions to discriminate against someone in a manner referred to in points 1–4 that are given to someone who is in a subordinate or dependent position relative to the person who gives the orders or instructions or to someone who has committed herself or himself to performing an assignment for that person.
Despite the noble ambitions of the Discrimination Act, several dilemmas may arise when implementing the intentions of the Act. First, it is difficult to prove that the discriminatory treatment or treatment experienced is due to one of the equal treatment aspects and does not have personal or other grounds. Secondly, the construction or categorization of different groups with differences may be an obstacle to treating each human (pupil) as a unique person with individual characteristics, values and needs. There is also the risk of creating stereotypes such as the immigrant man, the white heterosexual Western man, Muslims, the immigrant woman, Finns, Latinos, begging Romans, through which people are generalized in groups with negative features as a way to acquire benefits in the struggle for resources and interpretative prerogative. However, the main dilemma of equal treatment is the uncertainty of what groups and persons are covered by this equal treatment, that is, what status do national minorities, newly arrived, asylum seekers, EU immigrants etc. have in this legislation or are these groups not included in legislation.

When the concept of diversity is used in the sense of ethnic- and cultural diversity, it gives an impression that there are cultural group differences. Paragraph 11 uses the concepts of cultural diversity, cultural meeting place and that children / pupils are to develop identities embracing several cultures.

Multiculturalism is a term used in mass media, research and in governmental documents. In the scientific contexts terms like, multicultural, intercultural, multiethnic, transcultural, etc. can be used as synonyms with different scientific points of departure and traditions. In educational texts, the concepts of multicultural schools or multicultural education are often used when describing schools that have many students with foreign background.

More and more schools have become multicultural due to increased immigration. Even schools in rural areas and in smaller cities that previously had very few pupils with foreign background have now received a large number of newly arrived pupils with the refugee wave of 2014-2016. The change of student composition naturally places new challenges on the school's management and staff. Instead of being unaware of their incompetence on diversity issues, schools now express awareness and a great need to learn more.

In particular, they want knowledge on different ethnic groups, on how they think and their everyday understanding. One can find an essentialistic (Obondo, Lahdenperä & Sandevärn 2016) everyday understanding or the conceptualization of different cultures as rigid entities with metaphors such as "cultural crashes", "completely different cultures" or with a cultural understanding originating from a national culture, where the country is the basis for the development of the culture in that particular country. What is multicultural can therefore be described by national flags or national artifacts, values and characteristics. In addition to pupils with foreign background and newly arrived, there are also the mother tongue teachers who constitute the ethnic diversity of the schools. These teachers will contribute to the pupil's multilingualism if the pupil or the family requests it, because mother tongue education is not mandatory and is to be done outside scheduled time. This means that mother tongue teachers are not integrated into the school's activities and do not constitute a resource for the school's diversity work and integration.
Concerning the practical work on diversity and integration at the school, one can distinguish between different levels of activity: the official and the practical one. The official level with its policy documents and management plans contains equal treatment with key values and operational objectives, which can themselves be interpreted as a remuneration of democracy, equality, gender equality, equal worth, humanity, integration; that is, the basic values of multicultural activities (cf. Hedin & Lahdenperä, 2000). At the practical level, where the staff of the school actually have to communicate and realize the official ideologies, the staff tend to be working hard just to make everyday activities work. There are daily problems such as lack of staff, resources, knowledge and skills, facilities, student language skills, discrimination, racism and various types of dilemmas.

In multicultural integration, one tries to work with integration-promoting measures, which are usually based on the assumption that if you know more about them, you can do things for them instead of doing something together. In political pamphlets and speeches, the focus of the problem is usually put on so-called segregated areas with high levels of exclusion. These areas are usually populated by people of foreign background while ethnic Swedes constitute a minority. Of course, the absence of so-called Swedishness is a difficulty and an obstacle to the school’s work on Swedish language development and the general integration work into the Swedish society.

A school described as multicultural or multiethnic can be perceived as something negative and not worth developing because terms like diversity and multicultural are labels used on "immigrant schools", "segregated schools" or "wog schools" which, according to Bunar (2001), Lahdenperä (2010) and Voyer (2016) depicts a school with problems and difficulties. This becomes especially problematic when the number of pupils with foreign background exceeds 50% of the total amount of pupils at school. Many school leaders testify to the difficulty and the dilemma associated with finding a balance between the Swedish and the multicultural due to the negative label that an increased number of pupils with foreign backgrounds can bring (Lahdenperä, 2015; Voyer, 2016). The multicultural activity is downplayed and under-communicated not to scare off pupils with Swedish background. Mother tongue education is neglected or kept to the minimum. In addition, local school politicians may show a lack of concern for the school staff’s problems with getting the school to work due to the pressure that the segregation process entails. This dilemma will be difficult to manage as it is hard to make the school attractive to Swedish pupils and parents in the competitive school market, especially once the school has received a reputation as an "immigrant school". In light of this, the school may choose not to emphasize or develop multiculturalism but instead Swedishness with emphasis on a normal "Swedish school" and a profile that feels generally trendy and attractive.

**Intercultural integration and school development**

Multiculturalism and interculturalism can be used as synonyms in the scientific context (Lahdenperä, 2010; Lorentz & Bergstedt, 2016; Trondman, 2016). Nevertheless, there are qualitative differences between these two concepts, where multiculturalism is to get to know and to tolerate people from different cultures and to live peacefully side by side. The prefix inter- implies relations, interaction and exchange between the groups (Lahdenperä, 2004,
Interculturalism thus means an action, a process and social interaction across borders, unlike multiculturalism, which can be used as a measure of a situation, a condition, a state etc. As "inter" means interplay or interpersonal interaction, and "culture" means that something is cultural, that is, "systems of meaning that provide order and direction in human life" interculturalism suggests an interplay between different parties (Lahdenperä, 2004, p. 21). Meaning is created when the different parties interact with each other and become involved co-creators of culture and (new) meaning. To succeed in this mutual dialogue and co-creation of meaning, communication needs to be characterized by equality, respect, transparency and a willingness to cross borders. Interculturalism therefore calls for qualitative and value related aspects of communication and human relations. Mutual respect, recognition of each other’s differences and needs, equality, gender equality and social justice are some of the ethical values that often appear as the objectives of interculturalism.

Interculturalism can thus be considered both as a framework and a methodology for developing schools based on the diversity of students, parents and staff. Diversity is considered a resource, asset or a positive challenge for development (Lahdenperä, 2004, 2010). This development concerns the school’s various activities such as leadership, education, assessment, cooperating with parenting, health care, counseling, school development and staff competence. In her dissertation, Avery (2016) writes about intercultural school development and the important role of the school library as an arena for both student and teacher to meet across cultural boundaries, as well as how the library can act as a stimulating intercultural learning environment.

One of the fundamental ideas for work with integration is that the wide diversity that existed in different social institutions, the inclusion of the differences, all what is perceived as being different, should be taken advantage of when planning measures and training initiatives. Here interculturalism can increase the integration of the differences.

When originating from the basis of interculturality in integration efforts it becomes important to highlight conceptual and practical applications based on ethnocentrism and culture-bound assumptions, which impede increased diversity and lead to discrimination and racism. Different culture-bound assumptions, perspectives, frameworks and conceptions, that is, common constructions, need to be problematized and contrasted with other perspectives.

It is understandable that if all the staff at school share the same cultural background then it becomes harder for them to recognize and develop their culture-bound assumption and actions. Mother tongue teachers and other teachers with foreign background are therefore necessary resources at school. They are important, not only for developing pupils’ multilingualism and identity but also as "cultural interpreters" to expand the cultural horizons of the staff. Contrasting ethnocentrism and giving alternative interpretations to different phenomena, as well as contributing to the solution on different conflicts and dilemmas become important intercultural tasks for teachers with foreign or minority backgrounds.

About 20 to 25% of the population in Sweden have their roots in foreign countries and cultures. They are multilingual and perceive themselves as cosmopolitan, intercultural and multicultural. Ajagán-Lester (2016, p. 152) raises the question of whether the ethno-nationalist upbringing that persists in the pedagogical arena really corresponds to the new reality that mass immigrations have caused.
The ethnic identity can be described either as national or post-national (Lahdenperä, 2010). With increased migration, globalization and multicultural development of society, the formation of ethnic identity is also affected. Appadurai (1997) and Lahdenperä (2010) talk about post-national youths who have their backgrounds and roots in different cultures, master multiple languages and are open to a vast variety of impressions from around the world. By living and growing up with several languages and different cultures the ability to change between different cultural codes and perspectives is developed as well as the habit of socializing with people from different cultures, which in turn are important elements in the acquisition of intercultural skills.

Cultural and ethnic diversity can thus be a major asset for society and education, but can also cause dilemmas, tensions, disagreements and social conflicts in the absence of a desire to create meeting places for interaction, cooperation and participation. Cultural conflicts must be confronted by reassessing ideas, beliefs and perceptions. There is a challenge to create an intercultural learning environment where curiosity and communication are encouraged, and where an openness towards trying new ways of thinking and ideas is premiered.

According to both research and policy documents, interculturalism is something that is seen both as a means and as a goal for development of society and education based on diversity. A success factor for the development of the language, knowledge and identity of students is that they can use all their linguistic resources in school tasks, where teachers with immigrant background constitute an important intercultural resource.

Table 1 summarizes the different cultural systems of meaning in regards to their view on nationalism, integration, ethnic culture and language education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nationalism</th>
<th>Integration</th>
<th>Ethnic culture</th>
<th>Language education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monocultural</td>
<td>Ethno-nationalism</td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>Similarity/ Differentness</td>
<td>Monolingualism/ Bilingualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>Civic-nationalism</td>
<td>Multicultural areas</td>
<td>Essentialist</td>
<td>Multilingualism Mother tongue education outside schedule education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural</td>
<td>Post-nationalism Citizen of the world</td>
<td>Integration through differences</td>
<td>Systems of meaning</td>
<td>Translingualism Mother tongue important and mother tongue teacher as an intercultural resource</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tabel 1. Model of different systems of meaning

Epilogue
We live in an uncertain and turbulent era of war, conflict, terrorism and escalating violence in society. In addition, there are politicians and rulers around the world talking about ethno-nationalism and making their countries great and successful. Nationalists see patriotism as a virtue; they even consider their country and culture are something unique and worth preserving and defending even if it means war. Newly arrived pupils come with their parents, relatives or alone from war-hardened areas with a desire to seek peaceful conditions for their upbringing. Sweden has managed to avoid war for several centuries. We have not felt the need to introduce peace education and knowledge on how to solve international and national conflicts in school under the peaceful and calm conditions in Swedish society. A survey of young people’s perceptions of peace in the Czech Republic, Poland and Sweden (Borgström & Graviz, 2016), found that traumatic experiences, acts of violence and double standards are some of the factors that hinder the development of peaceful values. Rather than anyone talking about what peace is, young people themselves have gained in-depth insight through their own creation of the importance of peace and human rights. The researchers highlight intercultural work and education as a way of working on peace with children and young people.

Finally, I would like to highlight the development of cosmopolitan values and knowledge about democracy as a central objective for the schools’ work with newly arrived so that they can contribute to the democratization processes in Sweden, in their home countries and globally. In the cosmopolitan value base, ethnic identity is not tied to a certain nation but to several nations. This is known as post-national identity and the goal is a multilingual, multicultural, post-national and cosmopolitan citizen with the knowledge and democratic skills required to work in a globalized world. Having roots in different cultures, different loyalties and growing up in Sweden with a Swedish school background means constant intercultural meetings and the opportunity for constructing an intercultural identity in which Swedish culture is an important complement to other cultures. Acquiring democracy skills to work on democratization and peace processes is, in my opinion, the most important skills that Swedish schools can develop in newly arrived and young people. In an increasingly globalized and conflicting world of war, violence, disasters and extremist groups, these skills cannot be underestimated.

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