

Jagiellonian Inspirations in Inter-cultural Education



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Along with progressive transformation and globalisation, both also through modernisation, the possibilities of communication have changed the character of contemporary intercultural and multicultural processes. In current transformations, the Internet has had and continues to have a particular part to play. As an additional dimension in the world of the human presence, it carries out, without limits, human aspirations related with the need to go beyond the frontiers of one's own culture, within which it indirectly shapes one's ability to exist and function on the cultural, intellectual, psychological, social and political frontiers, etc. Therefore, the possibility of has appeared of moving between different cultures, talking to and being in contact with people thousands of kilometres away who differ not only regarding language but in their way of interpreting facts and events. On the other hand, technology has limited interpersonal contact to electronic messaging which has a direct influence on the shaping of intercultural communication. The web has become, therefore, both a liberating and a limiting instrument. Although it facilitates constant intercultural contact, at the same time, prevalence of anonymity and haste in the virtual space impoverishes intercultural communication in the non-verbal dimension, limiting direct contact, making closeness shallow, increasing short-term and superficial interpersonal relations. Many of these virtually generated elements are subsequently transferred to reality and vice versa. The relationship of these two dimensions and their

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mutual influence is a fact, albeit one whose range has not been examined. The conduct and attitudes of shaping in one space are frequently translocated to another, most often in a symbolic dimension. Similarly, the process of shaping intercultural relations entering into the virtual space, with the above-mentioned dysfunctions, may be transferred to the field of a genuine reality. In turn, the models of behaviour formed in reality may find their reflections in cyberspace.

Currently, both the first and second spaces, in creating a hybrid world which is mobile in various dimensions and spaces, have generated cultural contact more often than any period in human history. The merging of the real and virtual spaces itself has already dynamized the process of broadening cultural fields, a natural result of which is their superimposition on each other. In this way, new multicultural fields arise, thus fields in which cultures may exist alongside each other while not entering into deep interaction with each other, within which they do not establish different types of relationships. The multicultural space may evolve into an intercultural space or also close itself off to cultural diversity. In the first case, the establishment of a group of two or more cultures is characterised by the development of mutual relations which exhibit change, transfer and cooperation. This is a dynamic situation, simply one which is transgressive with significant potential for development. Multiculturalism itself is a significantly more static situation, may possess a conservative character in which cultures tolerate each other, may coexist, not entering into deep relations with each other, while at the same time, not mutually drawing from their values. Multiculturalism is, therefore, a certain kind of resource which may, but does not have to be employed, one which contains an enormous potential for interaction, although it can also be diversity in a 'frozen' state. This also occurs when there exists a high degree of hostility between cultures with each of them surrounding themselves with safety barriers, thus dividing the world into areas reserved for themselves and in which they close themselves off from others.

In new circumstances, the processes of globalisation, mobility and the erasing of borders gives rise to a need for intervening in worlds which are isolated, divided and closing themselves off from contemporary challenges, displaying how wise it is to benefit from the richness of many cultures, their mutual merging, as well as how to stop processes of exclusion. Theseeking of answerstokeyquestionsregardinghowto developintercultural

relations in a new hybrid environment, ones which will build, not destroy, ones which will integrate, not divide, through maintaining and respecting the cultural separateness of all sides and linking itself with the development and implementation of the principles and tasks of intercultural education. This constitutes, therefore, a crucial element in the processes of building proper intercultural relations, raising and shaping appropriate bases, stimulating reflection on the possibilities of development and self-development in a culturally diverse environment. In this regard, intercultural education has a significant role in deepening respect towards others and simultaneously to oneself, mutual familiarisation, creating understanding and mutual enrichment through interactions, the strengthening the importance of diversity, and within this, shaping the basis of tolerance and mutual acknowledgement. One may seek the inspiration for this type of education in distant Jagiellonian times in which the coexistence of cultures and the building of appropriate relations, not so much multicultural but intercultural, was the result of a correct understanding of social needs in the context of not only the politics of the state but, above all, interpersonal relations.

It is this intercultural education which is characterised by complexity and multi-dimensionality while, at the same time, not tearing itself away from its history and positive examples of building values in diversity. It does not limit itself exclusively to learning about reality but also changing it. It may, therefore, take on the contemporary challenges of civilisation, concentrated around the issues of maintaining cultural dignity through respecting the needs of others and, above all, by respecting their rights. They demand reflection going beyond the technocratic and technological question 'how does contemporary intercultural communication develop?' It has become essential to understand the origin, motivation, aims and point of human activities, including also the employment of contacts, incorporating them into interactive communication processes in which they may become a subject of dialogue and moderation, interpretation and inspiration. This necessity depicts itself very clearly when we look at the significant increase in the role of communication, as well as changes in its forms and motives.

In an age of cultures and value systems coming together and sometimes clashing, in an age of strategic planning of the development of organisations, educational programmes, professional careers and

models of social interaction, getting to know people and the world around us may not be abstracted from questions regarding the intentions and cultural models of the evaluation and development of intercultural competence. Many phenomena of cultural confusion indicate that we are not prepared to effectively and wisely conduct an intercultural dialogue as we are lacking the ability to understand and interpret various cultural facts. Much support and inspiration in the development of intercultural education may flow from other contemporary social sciences and the humanities, as well as the anthropology of intercultural relations which present, as a whole, human relations with the surrounding world in the context of the need to understand the diversity of cultures and the philosophy of dialogue related with it. Also of huge significance are conscious relations, not only with cultures which we consider modern but with the enormous achievements of each culture accumulated on resources of its heritage which may include examples of good practice, effective and tested solutions, albeit forgotten and pushed into a characteristic culture of amnesia. Getting to know, and sometimes decoding cultural heritage is a kind of intercultural communication. Communicative abilities developed during intercultural communication indicate what one should do for them to become an instrument of understanding, discovering one's own identity built on still more basic skills of recognising the values of one's native culture, as well as foreign cultures. In this way, we build bridges between the generations, environments, religions and civilisations, occasionally between those in our closest circle, also securing them from the building up of nationalism, conflict or cultural violence. Such bridges, built through understanding one's intercultural educational role also aids one in understanding ourselves. This is even more so when one considers that effective forms of intercultural education were comprised of the educational experience of many distant periods which inspire us up to today, among which the Jagiellonian age deserves particular attention. However, before dealing with the issue of Jagiellonian inspirations, it is essential to discuss contemporary challenges.

The contemporary intercultural educational space

The multi-dimensional nature of contemporary processes blending cultures inclines one, when analysing them, to assess the various possibilities of their coming into being, also including their generation through the development

of information-communication technologies. New technological solutions have increased the world we have known up to now by another dimension, namely the virtual space. Currently, we are witnesses to the ever more dynamic transfer of multiple components from the real world to the new field of the human presence. The virtual web is more and more broadly organised at a pace which it had never been possible to introduce change in all of human history, up to today. It is probable that this impetus of change, in fact, will become the main cause of both 'real' reality and human needs being unable to keep up with changes in the virtual space. Our experience up to now has shown that the newly generated field has been neglected and not frequently encompassed by actions aimed at leading to usefulness, order and regularity. The above charge also applies to education whose interest in the human presence in the virtual space is rather biased. Currently, we are at a stage of employing the web for educational aims but not shaping one's abilities to use web resources. An example of such disproportions is, unfortunately, media studies which, as practiced in schools, mainly directs its activities towards shaping one's ability to use information technology tools. In practice, this means computer equipment and applied programs completely omitting the broad range of information-communication competences, including multiple cultural components.¹

Among many unorganised problems in this virtual space, this issue of the human presence in a virtual space without limits deserves attention, as the definitions of the concepts 'multiculturalism' or 'interculturalism' lose their differing meanings in the traditional sense. These definitions most frequently allude to cultures functioning in the real space, existing in a particular territory in which the phenomenon of the appearance of different cultures and national, ethnic or religious groups undoubtedly comes into play. In new virtual spaces of the human presence, connecting the real and virtual elements, the definitions of multiculturalism and interculturalism must separate themselves from the determinative character of the physical parameters of the space. From here, the definition of these two terms which are key to further deliberations must take on slightly different content which takes the different types of spaces into consideration.

Multiculturalism is a phenomenon co-occurring in different cultures and national, ethnic or religious groups, employing the same space

¹ B. Siemieniecki, 'Kognitywistyka a edukacja medialna', in: T. Lewowicki, B. Siemieniecki (ed.), *Współczesna technologia informacyjna i edukacja medialna*, Toruń 2005, pp. 11–18.

at a different level and interactive character. The fact of multiculturalism has not yet resulted in a scale of mutual interest, or types connecting their relations. Multiculturalism is a situation which may generate various attitudes from hostility to synergy, from isolation to cooperation of various levels of awareness.

Interculturalism is a phenomenon of the interaction of different cultures which, employing this same space, enter into open and permanent relations with each other whose *raison d'être* is the exchange and transfer of cultural content. However, if by interculturalism one understands the merging and coexistence of national and regional traditions, history, as well as spiritual and moral values, it is undoubtedly a growing phenomenon, one which is currently spreading on a global scale.² This dynamic state, in which regular relations exist between significantly different human cultural identities, should be characterised by relations allowing the creation of a harmonic form above one's differences, while not eliminating them. Contemporary cultural studies must, however, consider the fact that these interactions may be practiced both in real and virtual spaces. What is more, they do not have to be linked with a necessity for cohabitation in the same territory. The virtual character of the contemporary space of the human presence creates, in a physical sense, a possibility to place distance between different cultures while simultaneously facilitating an unprecedented scale of blending and merging of cultures.

The concept of multiculturalism itself, as that of interculturalism (although both terms continue to be mixed up and used interchangeably), have for many years appeared in scientific deliberations in the context of the challenges facing humanity in the 21st century. The context of such interests is usually consideration regarding the dynamic changes appearing in the world which are aimed towards the creation of a world without borders and which are defined by the term globalisation. For some globalisation, which causes the blending, synergy and multiple cultural encounters, has become a desirable process, providing the hope that many problems may be solved. For others, it is depicted as a dangerous phenomenon. Regardless of which point of view we accept as correct, in order that living together in integration and interaction may happen in harmony, it

²H. Bednarski, 'Wielokulturowość – zagrożenia i szanse', in: M. Janukowicz, K. Rędziński (ed.), *Edukacja wobec wielokulturowości*, Częstochowa 2001/2002, pp. 109-113.

is necessary to have a properly considered and suitably planned process of intercultural education. These needs have been indicated for many years by Tadeusz Lewowicki, the author of many publications devoted to the subject of intercultural education, perceiving them in the context of being an answer to contemporary problems. He states that *in carrying out socio-political changes, they are the answer for the needs of many groups of people, they are also a characteristic variant of the humanist ideology of behaviour and a field of social practices serving the unrestricted development of people (independent of their nationality or background) and their cultures.*³ The developmental opportunities of intercultural education lie not only in applying and suiting them to the needs of a political system, governing ideology, the participation of states and societies in international economic and cultural life but also in predicting social changes and the discovery of new areas of human activity, not covered up to now by organised and real education.

The development of contemporary web-based civilisation, in possessing a global character, has become an even stronger mechanism spreading cultural values, creating in a wider and wider range multicultural societies, on the one hand, and societies closed to cultural difference, as polar opposites. In the conditioning of unrestricted mobility, a world without borders, we feel ever more strongly the need for not as much multicultural or intercultural education but that which leads to cultural dialogue and their mutual coexistence. This does not only concern the comparison or confrontation of different cultures with each other, or also inspiring mutual encounters and the exchange of experience, as these continuously occur in the virtual space. It concerns the deepening of the character of these contacts from observing to understanding, from one who is unreflective to one consciously participating and, finally, from polemics to dialogue.

The deliberations of scientists up to now have concentrated on intercultural education entering into the traditional real space. The contemporary Giddens' 'period of bewildering change'⁴ directing an new virtual dimension of the human presence, inclines one more and more

³ T. Lewowicki, 'Wielokulturowość i edukacja – zagadnienia ogólne, ujęcie porównawcze', in: T. Lewowicki, F. Szłoska (ed.), *Kształcenie ustawiczne do wielokulturowości*, Warszawa–Radom 2009, pp. 27–28.

⁴ A. Giddens, *Socjologia. Zwięzłe, lecz krytyczne wprowadzenie*, transl. J. Gilewicz, Poznań 1998, p. 15.

towards reflection on the course of the blending processes and cultural relations, as mentioned earlier, in the virtual space. The case at which users of the Internet establish intercultural contacts is extraordinary and one may pose the question whether intercultural education is necessary at all given that involvement with different cultures runs here in a voluntary, even a remarkably natural manner. The answer to this question seems to be simple. Although it is true that people from different cultures are meeting each other more often than any time in history, this does not mean that difference has stopped giving rise to misunderstandings and conflict. While the world has become a global village, this is mainly at the level of business, media and economics. The members of different cultures dress the same, listen to the same music, study at the same universities, use the same symbols, contact each other using Facebook, and search for information first on the Internet, not in books. However, in particularly important situations, deeply rooted primal social reactions come into play. Thus, intercultural education is necessary for them, both at the interpersonal and inter-group level, as well as between cultural organisations.

The Jagiellonian idea in contemporary education

The roots of intercultural education in Polish tradition may be found in the distant Jagiellonian past when the practice of relations coming between different cultures created a reality described in theory significantly later. Many of these past Jagiellonian inspirations may be a stimulus to the development of contemporary multicultural but, above all, intercultural education whose adapting to current contexts provides an opportunity not only to deepen one's knowledge on the subject of different cultures but, above all, learn the ways of understanding them, as well as cooperation through diversity.

Jagiellonian ideas, one of the great ideas of the state which came into being in the territories of the Polish and Lithuanian Commonwealth, have been defined and assessed in various ways. One should, however, remember that they were described at the theoretical level in the 19th century, while with the perspective of time, they have been subjected, and are still subjected to various interpretations. However, the true Jagiellonian idea is the embodiment of a certain ideal group of values in real, albeit changeable historical-geographical circumstances. It joined together in a peaceful manner a society coming from different

cultures into one state and taught the principle of coexistence, one which was difficult, sometimes full of conflict but beneficial, and one which invoked not only instrumental values.

This peaceful unification was emphasised by one of the first creators of the theory of Jagiellonian ideas, the historian Karol Szajnocha (1818–1868), writing in his work *Jadwiga and Jagiełło* that: *this was the only example in history of a voluntary unification of people who had been hostile for centuries, to whom history even more precisely was to grant peace. The happy cooperation of different reasons changed this unprecedented union of nations into a closer union of families and people.*⁵ The Polish-Lithuanian Union and the Pact of Horodło were undoubtedly a precursor of political, cultural, educational and economic actions displaying how, by not employing violence in times full of war and aggression, one could unite different cultures and create conditions allowing their equal coexistence.

This equal coexistence was possible through the guaranteeing of autonomy of certain constituent parts of the union by, above all, religious and linguistic tolerance, but also not differentiating its citizens regardless of background, religion or language, handing control of administration over to them on the basis of one's place of residence not background, the creation of elements of democratic freedom, etc. Witold Kamieniecki focused attention on all of these elements formulating, in 1929, one of the first full definitions of Jagiellonian ideas: *The Jagiellonian Idea is a political system based on the drawing in to the Polish state by way of voluntary accession, a union of neighbouring territories covering the geographical region between the Carpathians and the Baltic. Created as a result of the union, the Jagiellonian Republic based its structure on the following principles: a unified political system (the Polish Crown/Lithuania), autonomy for certain constituent parts of its territory, an administration comprised of local citizens, equal linguistic status, religious tolerance, the development of civil democratic freedoms, the reconciliation of patriotism towards the Polish republic with patriotism of a local and local-ethnic, [and] the advocacy of western civilization.*⁶

Of course, not all historians have assessed Jagiellonian ideas positively and, while among them there is no shortage of supporters or

⁵ K. Szajnocha, *Jadwiga i Jagiełło 1374–1413. Opowiadanie historyczne*, Sandomierz 2014.

⁶ W. Kamieniecki, *Ponad zgiełkiem walk narodowościowych. Idea jagiellońska*, Warszawa 1929.

opponents, it is a fact that the eastern policy of the Jagiellons while on the Polish throne took various aspects into account including those which were religious, economic and political but, above all, cultural and which were meant to ensure unity in various dimensions. This encapsulation of various aspects ensured a greater chance for a peaceful joining together of sides hostile to each other and displayed the wisdom of Polish and Lithuanian rulers.

It seems that the Jagiellonian format may be extended to contemporary times. Suitably modified and applied to today's reality, as well as social needs, it may become an element of intercultural education, showing using real examples how, in practice, to ensure the coexistence of different cultures in a long-term perspective. The Jagiellonian idea, although one may talk also of many Jagiellonian ideas present in the intellectual, artistic and religious life of this time far from forcible restrictions, is an example of a the planning of multiple-range activities, encapsulating various aspects of the whole ensuring not only the coexistence of cultures but their in-depth interaction. This does not erase cultural differences, respecting their diversity but has stimulated deeper interaction on both sides. All of these components may become the goal and task of contemporary intercultural education while its understanding must be linked with, on the one hand, the perception of the need of its application in a broadened hybrid world of the human presence while, on the other, with invoking real historical examples of its use.

Intercultural education may, therefore, be perceived at multiple levels regarding the various dimensions linked to it, namely political, economic, social and cultural, which create an attitude of openness, as well as building culturally shaped systems of norms and cultural models. Co-dependences may comprise the basis for their more integrated and reflexive understanding while at the same explaining their dynamic and evolution. In such a context, the understanding of intercultural education could take on the following form: Intercultural education is an open system which, on the one hand, includes the knowledge, ability and attitudes of members of various cultures shaped under the influence of planned actions, as well as experience of a social and civilising character while, on the hand, including their goods resulting from a creative and meaningful participation in the process of cultural interaction.

The following is how intercultural education is understood, shaping its characteristics through:

1. *Participation* – both in structures, sources, processes, as well as cultural changes. Its conditions, principles and scale simply determine the degree what we want to call openness to cultural diversity. It is, in fact, this participation which becomes the principle value, premise and aim of social development as a value essential for the development of the individual and society. We assume by this that it has a developmental character and is not linked to the degradation of particular cultures, divesting them of their identities and differences.
2. *Transgression* – the overcoming of many cultural frontiers, in many areas and in many regards. In the context of intercultural education the most important of these are cultural, along with psychological and spatial transgressions, which in an age of the most modern information-communication technology is becoming ever more possible, and simply advanced. Transgression in the intercultural education context means the learning of existing changes, as well as generated cultural models. The dynamic perspective of intercultural education means both the activating of the transgressive potential of subjects coming from different cultures, accepting that the types of actions generated by individuals are an effect of the creative modification and synergy of particular cultural models as a consequence of dynamic changes in one's surroundings.
3. *Communication* – contemporary intercultural education does not fulfil the condition for participation or transgression without intensively developing the means and forms of communication, both interpersonal, cultural or intercultural, as well as those which are currently performed with the aid of electronic communication in the rapidly developing 'web' of connections and messages. The development of processes of intercultural communication, understood by this not as a one-way message, thus a transmission but a form of interaction, is becoming an inherent characteristic of contemporary intercultural education, as in culture itself in a general sense, causing their dependence on each other in more and more ways.

4. *The creative revitalisation of cultural heritage* – which constitutes a kind of a separate space of values, models and inspirations regarding a rich source of good practices, ideas and experience, of which the best example is the Jagiellonian cultural heritage.

Conclusion

Today's world of virtual and media culture may not be viewed in the category of one which is in an unmoveable state: it is not a rigid quasi-object but a continuous, infinite stream of changing events. The processes included within it of various intensities and speeds constitute the basis of generating new forms of cultural encounters of an unprecedented strength but also structure, roles and functions. It is a world of growing interaction which will enter the area of the direct competence of many groups, institutions and people unprepared for this phenomenon. All of this has a key significance for the contemporary understanding of intercultural competences essential in situations of cultural encounters and interactions. The changing character of intercultural processes, carrying out, in a unlimited manner, people's aspirations related with needs to go beyond the boundaries of one's own culture, require deeper, more intense and more reflexive shaping of the capabilities of being and functioning on cultural, intellectual, psychological, social and political frontiers etc.

In using the Internet, almost as a rule we find ourselves in a world of the mixing up of many cultures, regardless of whether we want this or not, or whether we agree and what our attitude to diversity is. The merging of the real and virtual spaces has initiated a process of broadening the cultural fields which are superimposed upon each other, entering into various processes of interaction. As a consequence, they constitute, to an ever greater degree, not only multicultural but intercultural, by the fact of their mutual influence, transfer of content, cooperation but also sometimes intense clashes and conflicts. This is, in fact, why in these new circumstances the human presence has given rise to an enormous need for intercultural education, broadening its scope beyond the real space while not overlooking it. Both the first and second dimensions, in the context of contemporary challenges and requirements, demand not repressive, prescriptive actions but exemplary, educational and appropriate bases founded on values allowing for the deepening of relations of different cultures. By this, contemporary education in the field of cultural diversity should not cut itself off from its own history, to which belongs, for instance,

the successful exemplification of the policy of multiculturalism of the Jagiellonian Polish Republic. Appearing during the period of the 14th–16th centuries, multicultural interactions showed how complete understanding ensures not only a knowledge of languages but a significantly deepened motivation, common interests, multifactorial and multi-range actions, referring to instrumental, symbolic and spiritual planes of the existence of culture. Of significance is that a broadened analysis of the pluralism of Jagiellonian values reveals how important the idea of balance is in thinking regarding what is ‘our own’ and what is held in common, which constitutes the particular and universal need of every cultural group present in an interactive space. The history of formal agreements between Poland and Lithuania from 1385 to 1568 shows, at the same time, how much can be learned from one other, how to better understand different points of view in the dynamic of a common search for the common good.

Therefore, in order to be effective, contemporary intercultural education, in alluding, on the one hand, to tradition while alluding to the demands of a modern, hybrid world on the other, would have to both refer to many new cultural forms and methods along with those that are old and lie in the fields of cultural heritage, namely forms and methods of dealing with multiculturalism, the various results of reaction and interaction, and diversity which demand entering deep into the foundations of core, frequently inspiring values. Intercultural education understood in this way could be an active step preparing society to function in a new reality. However, allusions to the rich achievements of the Jagiellonian heritage are surprisingly creative whose remains being little known, contrary to appearances, may be an arsenal of ideas joining together values which are local and universal, national and of the state, and those which are individual and of the community. Jagiellonian inspirations of intercultural education ensures it an axiological base for respecting an opening up to the values of other cultures, as well as to the transfer of the most important of its traits into the contemporary hybrid space.



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