

Werona Król

Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland

Dimensions of Multicultural Education and Their Implications for Primary School Foreign Language Teaching

Introduction

Proper multicultural education encompasses both theory and practice. Indeed, taking the existence of a multiethnic, multiracial and multi-language world for granted, it is a continual process. Although there has been no agreement among the advocates of a single common definition of **multicultural education** (ME), many feel that the definition given by Banks and Banks (1993) is the most complete. It describes multicultural education as “an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school”.

In the Polish reality, the phenomenon of multiculturalism is not yet particularly widespread, though it does not mean that we are excused from raising the issue. Therefore, in the following article I would like to present a general outline of the thinking of a prominent figure in the field and adapt his ideas to a primary school context, since in the case of young learners, teachers should focus more on raising their pupils' awareness that the culture in which they are growing up is not the only and the indisputable one.

Professor James A. Banks

Professor James A. Banks is a past president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). Currently, he is the Kerry and Linda Killinger Endowed Chair in Diversity Studies and Director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, Seattle, where in 2005 he delivered the 29th Annual Faculty Lecture – the highest honor given to a professor at the University. His lecture entitled *Democracy, Diversity and Social Justice: Education in a Global Age* would spotlight several aspects of his decades of professional experience - research, writing and teaching (Kelly, 2005). He has been a specialist in multicultural and social studies educations and a prolific author in these two fields. Enumerating his honors, awards and works would occupy numerous pages. Therefore, the present paper introduces only some of them, selectively. Those who are interested, please refer to the University's webpage devoted to Professor Banks: <http://faculty.washington.edu/jbanks/>. Among other titles, the scholar is the co-editor, together with Cherry A. McGee Banks, of the landmark publication *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, for which they received the Book Award from the National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME) in 1997. NAME is a non-profit organization that advances and promotes equity and social justice through multicultural education.

When it comes to Professor Banks' education, he received his Bachelor's degree in elementary education and social science from Chicago State University and his Master's and Ph.D. degrees in these fields from Michigan State University. Moreover, the former elementary school teacher received six honorary Doctorates of Humane Letters from American colleges and universities. Over time, Banks has become a leading voice in the theory and practice of multicultural education, with some even calling him the father of that discipline.

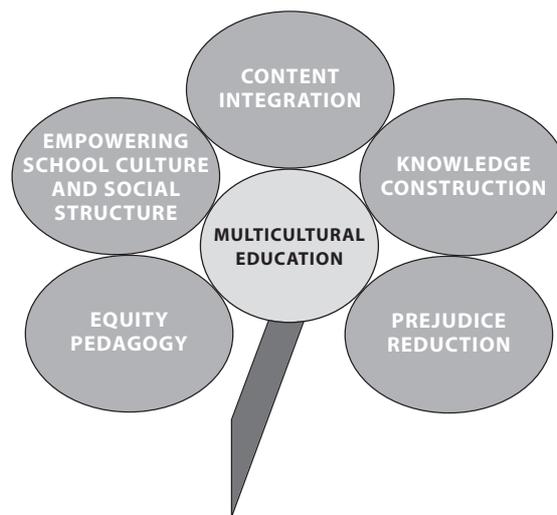
Dimensions of multicultural education

Professor Banks identified **five dimensions of multicultural education**, which I would like to discuss. They encompass the field's major components, namely:

- content integration,
- the knowledge construction process,
- prejudice reduction,
- an equity pedagogy,
- and an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 1995; Banks, 1999).

It is worth emphasising that the categories of the typology presented above, although conceptually distinct, are interrelated and overlapping, and are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, the classification scheme offers an approximation but does not in fact describe reality with its all complexities. The dimension typology provides a useful framework for further investigations (Banks, 1993).

Figure 1. Bank's five dimensions of multicultural educations – floral graphic representation.



In an interview for the National Education Association (Banks and Tucker, 1998), Dr. Banks explains why he developed these dimensions. He found in his work with teachers that many thought of multicultural education as merely content integration and he did not like this ignorance. He wanted to help educators see that content integration was important, but that it was not the only dimension of multicultural education; he argued that there were at least four more.

Analogically, the first dimension is **content integration**. Banks's first initiatives concentrated on putting African American, Mexican Americans and Asian Americans in the curriculum, but generally speaking content integration deals with "the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, generalizations, and issues within their subject areas or disciplines" (Banks, 2013). Content integration is effective, provided that the infusion of multicultural elements into the subject area is logical and not contrived.

The second dimension is **knowledge construction**; in other words, helping students become more critical thinkers. The knowledge construction process moves to a higher level because here teachers help their pupils "understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions and frames of reference and perspectives of the discipline they are teaching" (Banks and Tucker, 1998).

By the third dimension – an **equity pedagogy** - Banks means that teachers should change their methods to enable students from diverse racial, ethnic and cultural groups to achieve more. Catering for the majority of students can be done through increasing teachers' repertoire of pedagogy; for instance, through the use of a wide range of strategies and teaching techniques, such as cooperative groups, simulations, role-plays, discovery. In the interview, Banks also mentions his friend from the University of London who developed the concept of the "multicultural atom", this being the atom that all children understand. Banks claims that the metaphor captures perfectly the essence of equity pedagogy, which is how to teach about issues so that pupils from a range of backgrounds can understand (Banks and Tucker, 1998). As Banks and Banks (1995) state, helping students become reflective and active citizens is the essence of

the conception of equity pedagogy. This aid should enable them not only to acquire basic multicultural skills but also to use those skills to become effective agents for social change.

What is important to highlight here is that no teacher is omniscient. The world is so diverse that no single person can know each and every existing culture, not to mention their countless varieties. The key to multicultural education is a mutual exchange of perspectives. The teacher and the student should share, becoming joint learners and constructing new knowledge. This is how Banks sees teachers reconceptualizing their role, meaning those who aim to employ not only equity pedagogy, but all of multicultural education. Banks compares traditional teaching to “filling up the bucket”, providing students with readily accessible knowledge. In the case of multicultural education, we should rather talk about a pedagogy of liberation, in that teachers and students should become learners together (Banks and Tucker, 1998).

Prejudice reduction is the fourth dimension, to which teachers of all subjects should be particularly sensitive. It particularly concerns the development of students’ more positive attitudes towards groups different from the one they come from (Banks and Tucker, 1998). My observation is that at the age of six or seven children are not *tabula rasa* and may come to school with an already established bias towards other ethnic or racial societies. Research has shown that by the age of three or four, construction of gender and racial identity has already begun in a child (Araujo and Strasser, 2003; Ramsey, 2008 in Ogletree and Larke, 2010). At the same time, studies indicate that lessons and teaching materials, including multicultural content, can help students develop more positive intergroup attitudes, on the condition that the content is presented in a consistent and sequential way (Banks, 2001).

Last but not least, Banks introduces the fifth dimension called an **empowering school culture and social structure**. What he means here is looking not just at individual classrooms, but at the whole school culture in order to see how to make it more equitable. At this point we ought to look at, among other things, grouping and labelling practices and disproportions in achievement (Banks and Tucker, 1988). I view this

dimensions as the idea that the school institution (meaning the staff and their practices) should set a good model for children. It is a well-known truth that “the example comes from the top” and that children learn through imitation. If we want our students to become open-minded and tolerant citizens of the world, we have to be unbiased ourselves.

Preliminary considerations

The above section presented the main ideas of each dimension introduced by Banks. Based on this knowledge, my aim is now to discern their implications for primary school foreign language teaching. Before I start drawing conclusions, I would like to come back to the interview with Banks in which he gives teachers advice on how to become more aware of various groups’ cultural differences. This awareness is the key to proper multicultural education. Indeed, we could even say that teachers’ multicultural awareness is a point of departure for further work with students in the classroom. Awareness is the base, but the ability to reach across cultures is a never-ending process. In order to develop this indispensable ability, Banks encourages teachers to gain as much cross-cultural experience as possible. The perfect situation would be to do this by putting themselves in different cultures, coming into direct contact with representatives of different groups. When this cannot be done, educators should at least read more multicultural literature, watch films and documentaries, and discuss and digest the issues with others (Banks and Tucker, 1998). Taking these conscious efforts for granted, we can now begin to discuss the multicultural education of primary school pupils in a foreign language classroom.

Undoubtedly, foreign language teachers are quite privileged when it comes to their initial multicultural awareness. It stems from their professional studies of a given language and the culture of the language area. Consequently, when they start teaching they are already aware of the differences between at least two linguistic cultures – their mother tongue and the foreign one. This is not so much multicultural as bicultural, one may

say. This is true, but such knowledge allows for further personal development, opening teachers' minds, fostering the understanding of the world's enormous variety and looking at cultures from several perspectives. The worst sin in multicultural education would be to look at differences through the prism of one's own and "the only appropriate" culture as the point of reference and "hidden authority". What is more, Banks underlines the fact that the linchpin of ensuring that multicultural education is not just effective, but is also an approach, is the teacher's engagement in the process of self-transformation: of reading, of engaging with the other, of understanding that the other is in us and we are the other. He suggests that educators do three things: KNOW, CARE and ACT, and remember to ensure that their students do these things as well (Banks and Tucker, 1998).

When the classroom is multicultural, the context for multicultural education seems evident and becomes natural. However, more often than not, Polish classrooms are still homogenous in this regard – despite significant migration movements. Interestingly enough, Banks would contest such statement saying that all classrooms are culturally diverse and that we need to uncover this diversity. Take different social-class, religious, ethnic, gender groups, for example. Moreover, Banks – who is himself black who experienced racial discrimination in childhood – views the homogeneity of whites as a myth. Broadly speaking, people are diverse, but we have concealed those differences. After all, there is diversity in views and perspectives even within a seemingly uniform class (Banks and Tucker, 1998).

The implications of Bank's dimensions of multicultural education for primary school foreign language teaching

Keeping in mind Bank's five dimensions of multicultural education, it is possible to enumerate some implications for foreign language primary classroom practices. Let me start from the fundamental assumption that multicultural education incorporated into an FL classroom deals with providing knowledge about the cultures (in a broad understanding of the

term) and the contributions of diverse groups. This knowledge has to be adjusted to the age level of children, obviously. If we work with older students we may focus more on facts, but in the case of young learners, overload is not desirable at all, as it may have the opposite effect and lead to discouragement. The development of positive attitudes should definitely prevail. In order to achieve these goals, multicultural education demands culturally competent and reflective teachers. Unfortunately, when educators feel they lack such skill, they may do more harm than good or their efforts may not bear fruit. Great thoughtfulness should be exercised here. Primary school children will benefit greatly from multicultural education if it is conducted with care.

Each of Banks' overlapping dimensions of multicultural education can be presented with some practical ideas to be implemented in early foreign language teaching.

When it comes to content integration, its goal is to create an awareness of different cultures. A primary school foreign language teacher would need to use dolls or puppets of different colours, multicultural photographs and videos. Nowadays many of these things are already present in/ together with English textbooks, although some (especially those for 1-3 grades) are illustrated with drawings representing fictional characters, not real lifelike images.

According to Ogletree and Larke (2010 after Banks, 2004), in knowledge construction the teacher assists students in comprehending how knowledge is produced and influenced by different cultures. Banks (2004) distinguishes four levels to approach curriculum adaptation to knowledge construction:

- 1) contribution approach - when the focus is on "heroes, holiday, and discrete cultural elements";
- 2) additive approach - when "concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its structure";
- 3) transformation level - when changes are made to the curriculum so that students are able to "view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspective of diverse ethnic and cultural groups";

4) social action approach – when students implement what they have learned in the previous levels and “make decisions on important social issues and take action to help solve them”.

When analysing the above levels, we can see it would be possible to implement them in primary foreign language teaching. The contribution level would acknowledge different heroes and holidays in different cultures. Britain’s Boxing Day, America’s Thanksgiving Day, or Ireland’s Saint Patrick’s Day, for example, are often encountered in English textbooks. Teachers could go even further introducing thematic units and organizing “trips around the world”. The additive level would be reached if, for instance, a teacher was talking about housing and demonstrated pictures of unusual houses from diverse cultures. The transformation level requires greater attention, since teachers are obliged to make sure that the knowledge they are sharing is appropriate to the children’s age and developmental stage. Derman-Sparks (1989 in Ogletree and Larke, 2010) and Crary (1992 in Ogletree and Larke, 2010) both believe that this can be done by responding to young learners in the context of the situation. One idea would be that teachers read or create stories having anti-bias themes. However, the stories should be based on concerns that are derived from students’ own daily lives, experiences and current events, so that there is a tangible point of reference. The ultimate level of social action may be difficult to achieve in primary school, but it is still advisable that children begin to develop critical thinking skills early in their education.

Prejudice reduction, the next of Banks’ dimensions, focuses on decreasing cultural biases and increasing the integrative attitudes and values in children. The job of the educators in this instance is to show their pupils that the interpretation and judgment of phenomena by standards inherent to one’s own culture is actually a mental-behavioural limitation and a handicap. Ogletree and Larke (2010) conclude that the prejudice reduction dimension is particularly relevant in an early childhood setting, since youngsters may even develop “pre-prejudice”, which is defined by Derman-Sparks (1989) as “beginning ideas and feeling in very young children that may develop into real prejudice through reinforcement by prevailing

societal biases". Derman-Sparks (1989) clarifies that pre-prejudice may be "misconceptions based on young children's limited experience and developmental level, or it may consist of imitations of adult behaviour". To prevent pre-prejudice from developing into real prejudice, apart from giving deliberate explanatory talks, teachers should definitely take immediate action every time they hear or observe its indication. Moreover, the classroom setting should reflect a positive attitude and multiculturally-friendly atmosphere through diversity in decorations, toys, games, albums, posters – any item where culture may be reflected.

As for equity pedagogy, the improvement of most students' achievement is often done by understanding different learning and teaching styles. Purnell, Ali, Begum, and Carter (2007 in Ogletree and Larke, 2010) believe that to build culturally responsive classrooms teachers need to be inventive. The strategies proposed by them include storytelling, drawing, moving, singing, and creative play. Just to give one example, teachers may test recipes for celebrating the heritages of different cultures.

Finally, an empowering school culture and social structure was introduced by Banks as one dimension of multicultural education as well. Banks sees the school as its own cultural structure, based on multilateral participation, interaction and trust. He also adds that in effective schools, parents initiate more contact than in non-improving environments (Banks, 2004).

Conclusions

If we follow Bullivant's tracks (1993 in Banks and Banks, 1993) and understand **culture** in terms of a group's programme for survival and adaptation to its environment, then we should certainly recognise the need for multicultural education in every primary school. The programme, according to Bullivant, consists of knowledge, concepts, values, beliefs and interpretations shared by group members through systems of communication. Even if our children can successfully function within the frameworks of their native culture, in this day and age such

skill is often not enough. According to Bullivant's definition, in order to survive and adapt to a new cultural environment, it is indispensable to have appropriate knowledge of it, and experience. In the case of the lack of it, so-called open-mindedness and multicultural awareness may be useful. Being deprived of these characteristics, one feels adrift and helpless, which may even lead to a total communication failure. We do not want our students to get lost in the labyrinth of cultural diversity. We want them to become courageous and self-confident citizens of the pluralistic and interdependent world.

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Abstract:

In the context of contemporary reality, the issue of multicultural education is becoming more and more popular. Therefore, the purpose of the article is two-fold: to discuss Banks' five dimensions of multicultural education and to share some ideas on how these dimensions are or can be used to assist teachers in integrating multicultural content into their primary foreign language classrooms. Moreover, one section of the paper is devoted to the figure of Professor James. A Banks, who is widely regarded as a founder of multicultural education. Moreover, the professor's own reflections on the dimensions of interest expressed in the interview conducted by Tucker in 1998 are presented. Finally, having recognised the importance of early multicultural education, the author of the article concludes that primary foreign language teachers should not hesitate and encourages them to start preparing their students to become unbiased global citizens.

Keywords: multicultural education, foreign language teaching, primary school, dimensions of multicultural education, content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, empowering school culture and social structure

Information about the author:

Werona Król, M.A. (PhD student)

Pedagogical University of Cracow

Faculty of Philology

ul. Podchorążych 2

Kraków, POLAND

Werona Król, a PhD student of linguistics, graduated from the Pedagogical University of Cracow and the Jagiellonian University. Her main area of research is glottodidactics. She is also a practitioner, and teaches English and Italian to all age groups, though she specialises in early school pedagogy.

Contact address:

os. Słoneczne 11/17

31-957 Kraków

mobile phone: +48 503 104 594

e-mail: werona.krol@gmail.com