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## **Problem of Terminological Determinants in Structuring Intercultural Upbringing/Education – Is Interculturalism in Education Possible when Starting from “Conflict or Compromise between Islam and the Western Culture”?**

Czy międzykulturowość w edukacji jest możliwa, gdy punktem wyjścia jest „konflikt bądź kompromis między islamem a kulturą zachodnią”? Problematyka terminologii związanej z edukacją międzykulturową

### Streszczenie

Artykuł ten omawia terminologię używaną do definiowania bieżących wydarzeń związanych z napływem znacznej liczby ludności z krajów azjatyckich i afrykańskich do Unii Europejskiej oraz stosowaną w zakresie planowania wytycznych dotyczących edukacji międzykulturowej. Refleksja skupia się m.in. na problematyczności takich zwrotów, jak „konflikt pomiędzy islamem a kulturą Zachodu”. Sformułowanie to denotuje jako islam *de facto* fragmentaryczne światy, definiowane przez różne kultury. Sprowadzenie różnych kultur do jednej tożsamości (np. religijnej) pozbawia indywidualnego charakteru jednostki i przeobraża konkretne postaci oraz ich cechy w mglistą, nieprecyzyjną i ideologiczną formułę. Ogólne nastawienie do imigrantów i wobec edukacji dzieci i młodzieży z różnych stron świata dotkniętych dramatem wojny nie powinno być zniekształcone przez takie koncepty, jak „relacje Zachodu z islamem”. Edukacja międzykulturowa nie może opierać się na „integracji” dzieci imigrantów jedynie jako „członków” wspólnoty islamu, ale przede wszystkim jako ludzi, którzy mają swoje naturalne prawa do edukacji i których potencjał powinien być rozwijany poprzez ich uniwersalne, grupowe i indywidualne charakterystyki. Stąd też wszystkie pojęcia związane z międzykulturowością w edukacji, które bazują na nieakceptowanych definicjach terminologicznych, są, niezależnie od dobrych intencji, przeciwieństwem samej istoty idei międzykulturowości w edukacji.

Słowa kluczowe: determinanty, islam, imigranci, identyfikacja, edukacja międzykulturowa

## Abstract

This article discusses the terminology used to define the current events in connection with the arrival of large number of people from Asian and African countries in the EU, which is also used to design the guidelines of intercultural education. The author underlines the imprecision and problematic phrases such as “conflict between Islam and the culture of the West”. What the above formulation denotes as “Islam” are, in fact, parts of the world where there are different cultures. The reconciliation of different cultures to only one identity (e.g. religious) means de-personalization of human individuals and to conversion of real people and their characteristics into the vague, imprecise and ideologized formulation. The attitude towards immigrants in general and towards the education of children and young people from the countries affected by the terrible war should not be blurred by concepts such as “the relationship of the West and Islam”. The intercultural education cannot be built on the “integration” of children of immigrants only as “members” of Islam, but also as human beings who have their natural right to education and whose potentials should be developed throughout their universal, group and individual characteristics. Therefore, all the concepts of interculturalism in education which are based on unacceptable terminological definitions are, regardless of the good intentions, contrary to the very essence of the notion of interculturalism in education. Upbringing and education, as such, cannot stand for development of anything other than themselves within themselves.

Keywords: terminological determinants, Islam, immigrants, identity, intercultural education

## Introduction

One of the fundamental issues of multiculturalism in the contemporary world, is certainly related to intercultural education. Education, as an important and complex human social activity and also a phenomenon that refers to the most sensitive processes within “human nature”, embodies a scientific field of growing interest in this day and age. Surely, education has always been a field of scientific interest but today, in contemporary world which, in Ulrich Beck’s words, is “risk society”, it is also observed as a domain for achieving different goals, and as a field for resolving many social issues. Thus, different attempts have been made at redefining the tenets of education based on different pragmatic and ideological postulates. Those postulates ignore the idea of education as a primarily human (individual) need, and only consider it a social need (Tufekčić, 2014).

Today’s rapidly changing, increasingly virtual and abstract reality accentuates the need to revise and update the concept that carries meaningful and, at the same time, questionable (debatable) designation – “intercultural education”. It is above suspicion that education is fundamental to development of the individual and of society as a whole, that education in itself is development and that it directs towards the change that leads the individual and society to their final contours (Tufekčić, 2014). “Education is a process during which something assumes shape, idealists would say ‘its own shape’” (Hentig, 2004). Hence, education is inseparable from development and interculturalism. But it is also possible to problematize even the syntagm *intercultural education* because it raises the question: is there education against interculturalism

and what kind of education is that? Certainly, more detailed problematizing of that linguistic structure is not the subject matter of this article and our belief is that here “intercultural education” refers to the overall progress of the individual and society. That fact points out that the idea of *intercultural education* might provide a conceptual framework for making certain occurrences “more pedagogical”, especially occurrences which often contrast with upbringing and education. That way, education becomes its own antithesis (Tufekčić, 2014).

Namely, the word *interculturalism*, which is in this concept added to the word *education*, is made relative in today’s world where, alongside progress, human powerlessness, indifference, relativism and nihilism are also increased (Gudjons, 2008). Instead, presenting interculturalism as a way which leads to final form and character is replaced by ideological tendencies. They ideologically distort aforementioned final form and character – they portray distorted freedom as freedom, distorted justice as justice, distorted life as life (Tufekčić, 2014). That way, “education” which leads towards distortion might be presented as “intercultural education”. “It is unacceptable, however, when education demands one thing (values, culture, responsibility, maturity, leadership) and promotes something else” (Hentig, 2004).

It is believed that this also happens when imprecise and often suspect terminology is used in explaining intercultural education. It is possible to pose and nominate the question whether true intercultural education is possible if its determination and structuring employs problematic terminology. To put it differently: is interculturalism in education possible, if it starts with so-called “conflict or compromise between Islam and the Western culture”? This formulation, “conflict or compromise between Islam and the Western culture”, could be seen/understood as problematic. Why?

## Imprecise, suspect and problematic terminology

In the context of so-called “conflict of cultures”, how can something defined as “conflict between Islam and the Western culture” exist? In the classical sociological meaning of the word, Islam is not a culture. Islam is a religion which, like all other religions, has followers in all parts of the world and in all cultures. What is being denoted as Islam in the above-mentioned formulation “conflict between Islam and the Western culture” are, in fact, parts of the world where various cultures exist. Members of those cultures cannot be reduced to only one identity, i.e. the religious identity. Within those cultures there are people with different world views, religious and sexual orientations, and they all belong to various social classes. Reducing those people to the term “Islamic culture” or using only the term “Islam” represents stripping individuals of personality and turning real people, their characteristics and human fates into an unclear, imprecise, blurred and deeply ideologized formulation, which is therefore often malicious.<sup>1</sup> For example, in Europe there are debates regarding whether the Constitution of European

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<sup>1</sup> It is not possible to experience one’s religious or civilizational relationship as a comprehensive identity. For example, that being a believer is the only identity of anybody who became a member of the

Union should include a formulation related to “Christian roots”.<sup>2</sup> The Catholic Church made several announcements declaring that this formulation should stand in the Constitution. However, there is much resistance in all European countries because their citizens refuse to be identified exclusively through one component of identity, while some even do not find Christianity as part of a personal identity.

Hence, why are immigrants from the so-called Islamic world primarily members of something that is terminologically and linguistically suspect, scientifically imprecise in terminology and quasi-scientific, and yet formulated as “Islamic culture”? In numerous European countries there are domicile individuals who are Muslims by religion (descendants of Muslim immigrants who were born in Europe or those who have “converted” to Islam), and they would, accordingly, belong to the “Islamic culture”, while they are in no conflict with “the West”. There is no religion in the world that can be exclusively tied to any area in the world, since it is a spiritual category and a form of human consciousness. Spirituality does not recognize the East or the West. Islam is present in the West as well as in the East, and also Christianity is present in the East (it originated there, after all) as well as in the West, regardless of the exact number of followers of these religions on either end of the world. The same is analogous for Buddhism and other religions. There are many people in “the West” who express their spirituality through Buddhist teachings. The number of those people is not important here, their existence shows that the West is Buddhist as well.<sup>3</sup> This applies to other spheres of human spirituality. For example, are Arabic numerals, only because they are called Arabic, in conflict with the West? On the contrary! Or why these numerals, when they “arrived” to the West a long time ago and replaced Roman numerals, were not called Islamic because they were brought by people who, aside from being expert scientists and mathematicians of that age, were also members of Islamic religion.

How is it possible that today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we call people and their culture, as well as everything else that comes from certain parts of the world to Europe, exclusively “Islamic”? Of course, these people are mainly followers of that religion (albeit not all of them, lately among war immigrants, especially in the current situation, there is a significant number of Muslims but also Christians and members of other religions from the war affected areas) but they are also concrete human beings, men and women, children, with specific cultural and social characteristics and life orientations. A relation toward them must not be blurred by concepts such as “relation between the West and Islam”. What does this ridiculous concept mean in a situation where human beings are not able to satisfy their basic needs for life, food, freedom, education, development and safety?

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actual religion by birth, then that religious identification would have to carry a huge burden of solving many other problems that a person faces in the rest of his/her life (Ninčević, 2009, p. 62).

2 See in: McCrea, R. (2009). The Recognition of Religion within the Constitutional and Political Order of the European Union. *LEQS Paper*, No. 10, 1–55.

3 Probably just this leaves an overwhelming impression on the people of today: with all the colourful diversity of forms and figures, all religions are still the same and still think the same thing; all notice that except for them (Ratzinger, 2004, p. 19).

When we help or do not help people who must run from the atrocities of war and needs a shelter, food, living space, that qualifies as providing or denying aid to real human beings who are victims of a conflict (not “the conflict between Islam and the West” but a conflict, in the most general sense of the word, between good and evil in human existence, between the culture and lack of culture, between the constructive and destructive fuelled by interest, greed, misconceptions, egotism, sociocentrism, culturocentrism, etc.) and not providing or denying aid to Islam. With these actions we, therefore, show our attitude toward another human being and not toward Islam. We cannot feed, dress, educate Islam, but merely a person who may belong to this or that religion, culture, geographic location and who, as all of us, was not asked where he/she wants to be born and belong. And yet that person belongs to the human race, wherever he/she lives. The suffering of people is not the suffering of Islam or any other religion.

Hence, both everyday terminology and the scientific one must be “cleansed” of notions such as “the conflict between Islam and the West”, “Islamic refugees”, “Islamic migrants”, “Islamic world”. If we use this terminology in science, we will share the intellectual habitus of those who used poisonous substances to coin the presently topical term, which is linguistic weed and that is “Islamic state”. Truth be told, the constructors of this beast employ genuine Islamic symbols and names but “truth has the structure of a fiction” and, therefore, it can often be lied through the truth. Such evident “truth” can be the best means of lying (Žižek, 2006). These terms are often very useful to justify to our own consciousness the intolerance toward all other and different in the following sense: “Islamic state” does horrible things, so, how can we then aid people who come from “the Islamic world”, since “Islam is in conflict with the West”?

It has already been noticed that we do not call these people refugees, which they became due to horrible war, which is horrible wherever it happens, but we call them migrants (refugees are a type of migrants, but not every migrant is a refugee – those people who go somewhere on vacation or for the purposes of entertainment are migrants but not refugees). This occurs because the language we use to structure intercultural education reflects and portrays the substance (the essence) of our (non-)understanding of interculturalism but also shows how we treat others and different ones. “Language is the house of Being”, let us recall Heidegger in structuring and determining of intercultural education.<sup>4</sup> The language of the humanities today is partly contaminated and on the place of basic humanistic concepts and categories come ideological formulations that semantically never touch the essence of the phenomena to which they relate but only offer illusions and superficial contours.

What are the implications of all this on upbringing and education of immigrants’ children?

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4 See in: Heidegger, M. (1982). *On the Way to Language* (transl. P.D. Hertz). New York–Cambridge–Philadelphia–San Francisco–London–Mexico City–Sao Paulo–Singapore–Sydney: Harper & Row; Bennett-Hunter, G. (2007). Heidegger on Philosophy and Language. *Philosophical Writings*, 4, 5–16; Vandeveld, P. (2014). Language as the House of Being? How to Bring Intelligibility to Heidegger While Keeping the Excitement. *Philosophy Compass*, 9 (4), 253–262.

## The implications on upbringing and education of immigrants' children

Can intercultural education be based on unsupportable story of equal importance of all cultures, without deforming members of particular cultures by reducing them to one identity (in this case, religious identity)? Immigrants as individuals belong to a concrete culture, some are Syrians, some Iraqis, others Sudanic, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Tunisian, Moroccan, etc. They, also, belong to a concrete family, some are religious, some atheist, they have different sexual orientations, some are children, others grown-ups, etc. It is, thus, possible to propose the following questions: Is it possible for us to build any concept of multiculturalism in education by “respecting Islam as a culture”? Are we really in that way working on integration of children and youth? Can we even begin to think about intercultural educational activities in schools from the position of integrating “followers of Islam” into our education system, thus making education faceless, which it can never be, and achieve something contradictory to education instead? Interculturalism in upbringing and education would in this case represent acknowledging all characteristics of every concrete child, his/her mother tongue, family culture, culture in which he/she was formed and is forming, but also his/her individual aptitudes, potentials, possibilities and needs.

Multiculturalism cannot insist that a person's identity has to be defined by his/her community, or religion, disregarding all other relationships in their possession and that vary, ranging from language, social class, social relationships to political views and civic role, nor can it automatically give priority to the ancestral religion or tradition, as opposed to reflection and choice. The identity is not given once and for all, it is built and transformed throughout their lives (Ninčević, 2009, p. 62).

We should integrate him/her not only as a member of Islamic religion, if he/she is a Muslim, because it is possible for an individual not to feel as a follower of any religion, but also as someone who has a natural right to education, someone whose personal potential should be developed and someone who has universal, group and individual specificities.

If educational effectiveness becomes defined in terms of focusing on learning profiles according to cultural membership, there is a risk that education and training will become culturalized by highlighting inter-group differences to the detriment of intra-group and inter-individual differences. Between the ‘cultural zero’, meaning the ignorance or negation of the cultural dimension of education, and the ‘cultural all’, meaning an overemphasis on culture as the determining factor of behaviour and learning, the margin for manoeuvring is narrow. The fairly recent emphasis on culture pushes us in the direction of a ‘dictatorship’ of the cultural by reducing the individual to his/her cultural membership (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006, p. 476).

There can be no culture without people, so the notion of interculturalism in education, which seems general only at first sight, actually refers to relations between concrete individuals and their characteristics.

By educating people and making education possible for them with all their characteristics we do not educate only followers of Islam or Christianity, or any other religion,

but we also direct education toward further development of humanity which is comprised, among other features, of religions and their followers. In the same manner, by denying people these possibilities due to prejudice that they are less important or even dangerous because they “belong to Islamic culture” or “Islam”, and we apparently do not want Islam to develop (as if it depends on us!), we are not denying Islam anything or harming it. We are harming another human being as a member of humanity, the existence and survival of which is founded upon upbringing and education. Therefore, all concepts of interculturalism in education that come from the viewpoint that bridges and connections must be built between “Islamic culture” and “the West” or “the Western culture” are, regardless of existing good intentions, its own opposites, even a disgrace to educational practice and to the very notion of interculturalism.

Upbringing and education as such do not tolerate anything else happening within their processes except their own subject matter. Intercultural upbringing and education, hence, cannot be assimilation, indoctrination, socialization tailored by someone; it also cannot be integration, tolerance, “building bridges and connections between people” – it allows only for upbringing and education. Let us not integrate them, let us only take part in their upbringing and education. Otherwise, we will have a big deceit packed in a pretty “pedagogical” box, embellished with sonorous terminology which is, in the words of Sloterdijk, too beautiful to be true. Enabling every child to receive education with all his/her layers of identity is a path toward building interculturalism in education. When the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk, upon receiving the Nobel prize, appeared in European journalistic and intellectual circles and was recognized as someone who connects and builds bridges between the East and the West with his writing (although he is also characterized by his critical relation toward certain phenomena in Turkish society), he said in an interview for popular German newspaper: “I am a writer, not a builder of bridges”. Immigrants’ children should be raised and educated by preserving their special traits. They are not only “members” of something, often they are not in the least members of something we would prefer for them.

Understood as a knowledge of the Other, cultural training, whatever the level or depth of knowledge may be, remains external to the act of training because it rests upon a discourse of categorization and attribution particularly on the basis of factual and descriptive knowledge. In this way, it produces an artefact which in return justifies culturalist analyses. The educator no longer meets Yves, Antonio, Mohamed ... but the stereotype, established and reinforced precisely on the basis of factual, limited, partial or even biased cultural knowledge, about the French, the Portuguese, the Arabs ... The abstract and globalising knowledge of cultures obstructs the recognition of the singular individual, the subject of education, and it overshadows the training dynamics by acting as a filter or even a screen (Abdallah-Preteceille, 2006, p. 477).

There is no conflict between Islam and the West on the scene here, but rather something close to what Perotti calls the boomerang effect.<sup>5</sup> Colonizing, power-hungry and mercenary consciousness does not see this. It only sees “the building of bridges” and

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5 See in: Perotti, A. (1994). *The Case for Intercultural Education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Press.

“interculturalism” in the areas where others have a developed critical attitude towards what belongs to them, while they see the critique of their own self as a grave danger which demands defacing others.

## Conclusion

The right to education is the natural right of every human being who in his/her individuality pacifies universal, specific and special. Intercultural upbringing and education as such necessarily have their starting points in every human being, i.e. in every strata of their identity, or in all of their identities, and must not be blurred with imprecise terminology and definitions. Many language formulations that are used for explanation of interculturalism in education contain within themselves meanings that prevent true interculturalism that would be in its essence primarily the process of upbringing and education, and not just mere schooling or inclusion of “ones” into the culture and society of “others”. A prefix “inter” refers to everything that can be developed between concrete human beings, and not between artificially made constructs that are the result of ideologized consciousness. Thus, all language formulations that signify different forms of collectivity such as “the Western culture”, “the culture of Islam”, “Islamic students”, “relationship/conflict/compromise between Islam and the culture of the West” must be submitted to critical analysis in order to avoid ideologization, politicization and abuse of intercultural upbringing and education. Imprecise and scientifically unsubstantiated term relations that dehumanize human beings and erase idiosyncratic, and therefore group and universal, characteristics cancel out options of acculturation at the very beginning. On the other side, under the guise of interculturalism, they open the doors for opposite processes such as antagonistic acculturation, social exclusion, marginalization and depersonalization of individuals due to the initial insistence exclusively on one component of their identity, and it is usually the one with which it is “placed” in a previously given collectivity. Thus, insistence of terminological precision is not just a mere language issue. Different linguistic notions that are used for structuralization of intercultural upbringing and education lead to different outcomes of interculturalism in education. Definitions of terminology of intercultural upbringing and education also determine their essence.

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