

TENG Xing

Cultural Diversity and Integrated Multicultural Education

At the invitation of *Frontiers of Education in China*, we have organized a special issue on “Education and Cultural Diversity in China’s Society.” As I write, it is the time of the Chinese Lantern Festival. I can hear the firecrackers outside the window, and, watching the shining fireworks, I think a lot. Although globalization has been happening more rapidly in the past 20 years, in 2012, the characteristics of the variety of human culture is still as colorful as the fireworks in the sky. There are seven billion people in the world who come from more than 2,000 different ethnicities. They speak more than 6,000 languages and live in almost 200 different countries. In other words, most countries today have more than one ethnicity. In order to realize the national integration of civic education, every country faces the reality that different individuals and groups of people from different ethnicities have different education needs. Multi-ethnic countries have concerns about how to find ways to educate individuals and groups that are approved not only by the country but also by the ethnic group. Formal education must cultivate both a national identity and also the ethnic identity of all the countries’ various groups and individuals. Formal schooling must find ways to promote and adapt the “universal knowledge” of industrialized societies, while also promoting the local knowledge of different ethnic groups. Formal schooling must also find ways to teach the national language as well as the local language of various ethnic minority groups within the nation, and also one or two foreign languages. All in all, in the past decade, countries have put more emphasis on the preservation of cultural diversity through formal schooling, and governments have implemented a number of related policies. However, most countries still promote national integration and education based on the transfer of universal knowledge. The valuable languages, culture, and local knowledge of various ethnic minority groups in different countries, accumulated over thousands of years, have not received due attention in formal education.

Individuals in different cultural groups go through a socialization process from

TENG Xing (✉)

School of Education, Minzu University of China, Beijing 100081, China
E-mail: xingteng@163.com

a natural state of being to a societal state of being. In modern society, formal education plays an extremely important role in this process. This is because regardless of what profession, individuals in every ethnic group have essential life questions such as “Who am I?” “Where am I from?” and “Where should I go?” In the past, these questions would be answered and explained by family education, community education and church education. However, in today’s modern society, people spend most of the socialization process in schools. Schools thus have a responsibility and obligation to answer and explain these questions. Moreover, answers and explanations to these questions on the essence of life are inevitably closely related to mother tongue and local culture. If formal education neglects the students’ mother tongue and local culture, it will not be able to answer and explain these questions. Therefore, in conclusion, in the globalization and modernization of today, formal education in multi-ethnic societies should not only teach students to adapt to the modern “universal knowledge” of an industrialized society, but also teach knowledge related to students’ mother tongue and local culture. In this way, students will learn not only how to survive, but they will also understand the meaning of life and find a cultural sense of belonging. This style of formal education is ideal for human beings in the 21st century.

In my thirty years as a university educator I have conducted academic research in three major areas:

First, as a senior scholar of the “Fulbright Program” and visiting scholar, I visited the University of Hawaii, the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas several times for academic research. I wrote, translated and published textbooks and articles to introduce theory, policy and practice from many foreign countries to China about minority education, multicultural education, immigrant education, indigenous education and educational anthropology.

Second, for decades my students and I have been doing field work in remote rural areas. In the field of minority education, multicultural education and educational anthropology, we have contributed many Chinese examples to international academic research. I recently edited China’s first “Educational Anthropology Research Series,” published by China’s Ethnic Publishing House. The series includes approximately 50 different book titles. It not only includes case studies of different examples of ethnic minority education practices in China, but also research on Chinese minority law and policies.

Third, on the basis of ethnographic writing, related theories are constructed. Minority education, multicultural education, immigrant education and indigenous education belong to the field of educational anthropology. Educational anthropology is a comprehensive discipline intersecting the two fields of

anthropology and education. It inherits the concept of anthropological research and research methods in the field of education. Fieldwork, ethnographic writing, and theoretical constructs are the classical methods of anthropological research. Based on long-term work on Chinese minority education in rural areas, my students and I have not only recorded a large amount of different ethnic minority ethnographic material, but also have tried to explain these Chinese cases from different theoretical perspectives. Based on my own long-term research, I have also tried to construct theories to guide and inform the education of multi-ethnic societies, multicultural education, immigrant education and indigenous education. In this way, both the theories of cultural diversity and social education can provide references to various multi-ethnic countries when making related policies.

The 21st century is a fascinating era. There is a rapid growth of the minority population and the world economy. The trend of cultural integration is being strengthened. This requires citizens in the future to have more multicultural knowledge and cross-cultural global skills. This is very significant to the survival and development of a people and a country. After many years of deep research and analysis on theories of minority education and multicultural education inside and outside of China, in the field of multicultural education theory, I first proposed a unique “integrated multicultural education theory,” also known as “pluralistic integrated education theory.”

I think “integrated multicultural education theory” is best explained as follows: “the education of a multi-ethnic country has the function not only to transfer the common human cultural achievements, but also, it should pass on the valued and time-honored cultural traditions of its dominant ethnic group as well as the ethnic minorities.” The content of this “integrated multicultural education” should cover the majority ethnic group’s cultural traditions and those of the nations’ minorities. Ethnic minorities should be able to not only learn their own time-honored traditional culture, but also learn the culture of the majority. In this way, communities can improve the capacity of the younger generation of ethnic minorities to adapt to the mainstream culture and develop as individuals to the maximum. Members of the majority ethnic group also need to learn some traditional culture of ethnic minorities, in order to enhance awareness of ethnic equality and a sense of a family of nations. Thus the purpose of “integrated multicultural education” is to advance the cultural heritage of all ethnic groups; to enhance the intercultural communication between ethnic groups; to promote the economic and cultural development and prosperity of a common family of nations; to promote mutual respect and create an equal, friendly and harmonious political relationship, and finally, the ultimate realization of greater national unity.

The foundation for this theory is that in a multicultural nation, both the majority

ethnic group and minority cultures have their own unique traditional culture. In the long history of human beings, cultural exchanges between different ethnic groups have resulted in various ethnic groups having an “I have parts of you” and “you have parts of me” characteristic. In other words, the majority ethnic group absorbs culture from other ethnic minorities, but also ethnic minorities have some marks of the majority ethnic group. Formed in a multi-ethnic family, a variety of cultures co-exist, together constituting a “Common Cultural Group” which represents multiple ethnicities. The formation of said culture is the “Pluralistic Integration” referred to by Prof. Fei Xiaotong. From this theory, integrated multicultural education is the inevitable trend for the future.

First, implementation of multicultural education is determined by the characteristics of minority education¹. Minority education is different from ordinary education. Compared with ordinary education the difference is that minority education should always focus on cultural characteristics, otherwise it is pointless and without scientific significance. From the macro perspective, the cultural background of minority education has three components. The first is the ethnic minorities’ own cultural background. The second is the mainstream culture. The third is the cultural background of other ethnic groups. This complex cultural background determines that minority education should include the culture of different ethnicities. It should identify the mainstream culture, but also promote the inheritance and maintenance of the cultural characteristics of the minority group itself. At the same time, it should also learn from and absorb some of the cultural achievements of other ethnic minorities. Only through the exchange, collision, and absorption of different cultures can mutual understanding and respect between different ethnic groups be promoted. Learning from others’ strong points and closing the gap facilitates the understanding and respect of different ethnic groups. It also helps comprehensively understand, inherit and develop the culture of its own. Therefore, the characteristics of minority education determine the necessity of the implementation of multicultural education.²

Second, integration of national education is the mission entrusted by the times. The 21st century is a “New International Age.” The major characteristic of this age is cooperation. Different countries understand that, for their own benefit, it is impossible to maximally develop without the flow of an international market, imports and exports, and economic communication and cooperation. Close economic cooperation, which is also called economic integration, is the trend of

¹ The author’s original expression, 民族教育 (*minzu jiaoyu*) is not easily translated into English. Here it has been translated as “minority education” but implies education that is aimed toward people of a common ethnic group.

² China’s Education Commission, *Young Social Science Professors from 100 Universities*, (Hunan Normal University Press, 1993), p.1625.

the era. Economic integration pushes cultural integration. This has also brought political tolerance and military restraint. For this reason, all ethnic groups must follow development trends and also want progress.

Last but not least, the development of minority education into integrated multicultural education is a necessity for the development of society. If we deny the uniqueness of ethnic minority culture because of integrated education, then we also deny multicultural education. And this is extremely harmful. The denying of multicultural education results in a loss of the means of inheritance and development of rich traditional cultures. The disappearance of cultures may lead to the demise of the nation. At the same time, denying integrated education within multicultural education is unthinkable since the vigor and vitality of the national culture comes from the participation of various ethnic groups in the integration process. Thus, if we totally negate integrated education, multicultural education will also be abandoned by history.

In summary, “multicultural” and “integrated” are complementary to each other. “Multicultural” should focus on “integrated,” and “integrated” should develop with “multicultural.” Integrated multicultural education is the necessary choice of national education in the future. In this process, we should notice that integrated multicultural education is continuous. It needs long-term exploration and improvement from educators. In China, as elsewhere, it is still an area that is underexplored.

In this issue we have arranged three articles. Dr. Hu Diya’s “Cultural Endangerment and Education: Educational Analysis of the Change of Cultural Transmission of Dongba Dance of Naxi People in Lijiang, Yunnan, China,” is an ethnographic study of the cultural transmission of Dongba dance. Dr. Hu discusses the increasing decline of avenues of cultural transmission for Dongba dance, due to the limited representation of the culture in the curriculum of formal schooling in the local area where it originates. Dr. Zhang Shuang’s “Christian and Miao Education in Shimenkan, Guizhou,” takes a look at how students of the Miao minority are coping with cultural aspects of education and community amidst social change, and the impact of the cultural context on their academic achievements. Finally, Dr. Ou Qunhui and Du Na’s “Teacher’s Multicultural Awareness and the Ethnic Identity of Minority Students: An Individual Case Study of a Hani Student” considers the role of teachers’ multicultural awareness in promoting minority students’ ethnic identity, through an examination of the situation in one particular middle school.

These three papers reflect different perspectives of Chinese society, cultural diversity, and the impact of socio-cultural diversity on formal education. Furthermore, these articles are valuable because they are all based on fieldwork

in rural minority areas of China. Minority education in China inherits the method of anthropology. It focuses on fieldwork in rural areas, encourages a combination of theory and practice in rural areas, pays attention to the at-risk cultural knowledge, and brings new research forms to Chinese education. I hope these Chinese case studies can also provide some inspiration to related research in the West and promote communication.