

Multiculturalism: learning to live together and to love together

Friends, you might have noticed that I was limping slightly as I walked to the centre of this stage. About half an hour ago, as we were walking around this fascinating school, Margharita asked me if I needed any equipment for my talk. I said no, as I had prepared simply to address you in the old-fashioned manner, without aids or technology. But I do have one low-tech addition to my voice. It is this rather irritating small stone in my shoe, which I shall now remove. This stone is in honour of our founder, Peter Pelham, who always tried to make it difficult for us to take our daily habits such as walking, or talking, for granted. I shall try to give you some thoughts in the next half an hour or so which might cause you to question a little further the already stimulating and provocative thoughts and discussions of the past three days on the topic of multiculturalism.

When Peter asked me to propose a title for this talk, I said that I would be happy to do so, and to prepare some thoughts in advance, but that I would also wish to try to summarise some of the conversations that I had heard during the seminar. So I have been writing every day, adding to and adjusting what I had before I arrived. I have, however, stuck with the title that I gave Peter before he died. Here it is: “Multiculturalism: learning to live together and to love together”. In the e-mail that I sent Peter I went on to say: “Many theories of multiculturalism are stuck at the levels of tolerance and acceptance. I feel that we need to go beyond this to embrace celebration and love of others and their differences.”

This is a bold enterprise, a dream, and one that we might only be able to practise occasionally, but it is a goal worth having. At the same time, because we are human, let’s remember what Lee said in my group on Monday: tolerance is better than intolerance.

My title comes in part from the report published in 1996, commissioned by UNESCO, on education in the 21st century. The international commission chaired by Jacques Delors called its challenging and exciting document: Learning: the Treasure Within. Pilar used that word “treasure” on Tuesday morning and so let us remind ourselves that this organisation is a treasure and so should the learning be that we offer in our schools. The Delors Report, as it is often called, identified four general stages to learning. These are:

Learning to know
Learning to do
Learning *to live together*
Learning to be

The ordering of these four is important to me: cognition, action, community, then life, full, real life, best symbolised in my view by **love**. This is a word more and more difficult to use in an educational context but so important. As I grow older as an educator, I think that it is love that inspires what we do and that love should be the basic outcome that we try to instil in our charges, the students.

So, I am approaching multiculturalism within a framework of learning that says that learning to live together is vital to a fulfilled life and that, in our global society, living together inevitably entails multiculturalism. Built on this foundation is our knowledge of how to be.

Let me add a few words on terminology before I take my theme further. We have used the following more or less interchangeably during the past three days: multicultural; crosscultural; transcultural; and intercultural. The semantically pure would have it that we should not have, but we have. And while it is perhaps true that the concept of the multicultural may have had its day, it is our seminar theme and so for my purposes right now I shall use it as if it covers all the others: cultures side by side, cultures crossing over and learning from each other, cultures blending.

It is obvious, but worth repeating, that multiculturalism is not easy: learning a culture, and how to live in and with a culture, including even our first or mother culture, is a process of many stages. For me, there are six major attitudinal steps. These are hierarchical, a little like Maslow's human needs:

Inform/instruct
Tolerate
.....
Respect
Accept
.....
Embrace
Celebrate

It is in the last two stages that the provocative part of my title, learning to love together, finds its meaning. I believe that it is hugely important to find ways of practising the embracing and the celebrating in our schools, but how we do this will vary from context to context. There are no ready made, one size fits all answers.

But what, we have asked, is culture? Is it a thing, something that has objective shape and reality and that can be studied, anthropologically or sociologically. Yes, undoubtedly it is that. Pilar's working definition covered this aspect of culture. It is the system of patterns, rituals and behaviours that binds a community together and allows it to give expression to its group identity.

Multiculturalism on this level, and it is an important level, in schools that are either heterogeneous or that wish to acknowledge cultures outside the school, or both, often takes the famous form of the five F's, which have I know been referred to in group discussions this week: food, festivals, flags, famous people and fashion.

Let's remember that food can be fun, as we saw in the film that Chris showed us on Tuesday where he and his students were learning to eat with their fingers. Tasting the exotic, not just with our mouths, is exciting and can often be the first step on the road to a much fuller appreciation of another culture. But we hope that it does not stop there. And let's remember that it doesn't have to start there. It is easily possible in certain contexts to bypass the five F's and to go to the heart of other cultures by entirely different routes.

In the draft article, *Culture as a Configuration of Learning* written by a colleague of mine, Lodewijk van Oord, and circulated to all of you, many different definitions of culture are listed. Lodewijk settles on and chooses this one:

Culture is...conceptual knowledge: it refers to what humans learn, not what they make and do.

Culture in this definition is an ideational system, an inner map or programme, which defines **patterns for behaviour** and does not describe **patterns of behaviour**. It is very similar to Hofstede's understanding of

culture as ‘the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another’.

For me, actually, culture can be both these and more besides but I want to focus on the inner, ideational dimension of culture to bring out some of what I think are the more unusual dimensions of a genuinely multicultural enterprise. I shall focus on three consequences of this definition, illustrating them with stories, and I hope that these points will add an extra dimension to what has already been an exciting few days with you all.

My first consequence:

There can be many more types of multiculturalism than the obvious ones that are concerned with races, ethnic groups, nations and the like. Here are some other types of multiculturalism.

Intergenerational multiculturalism

It is not surprising to note that the inner map that defines our patterns of behaviour as individuals is one that changes in relief as we grow older. Not only do different generations develop their particular cultures but as individuals we move through changing cultural landscapes as we age. Genuine intergenerational multiculturalism, of the kind practised automatically in different forms of the extended family, is under threat. The treatment of the aged and the elderly in many developed world communities reveals an appalling failure of this type of multiculturalism.

Intergenerational multiculturalism has potentially productive implications for student/teacher relationships within our schools, as well as for vertical student/student relationships. I heard in my group yesterday of a compelling community service project within a school which involved young students working with older students to build community within that school society. It sounded like a successful multicultural project across generations.

Female/Male multiculturalism

One need not be sexist to recognise that there are some gender differences that are ideational in the sense described earlier. Gender multiculturality seeks to transcend these by developing the kind of sympathy, or better empathy, that is the hallmark of cultural intelligence. There may be a case for this kind of intelligence to be listed in the canon of multiple intelligences. In her talk, Pilar spoke of multicultural competencies and the crossing of gender divides fits well here.

Rich/poor multiculturalism

“Rich” and “poor” are terms that slip and slide, and we are right to ask at times, as Betty did on Monday, who is rich and who is poor and whether these states should be assessed only in quantitative measures. But the materially rich, and we here are all in that number despite our different bank balances, do inhabit a different world of ideas and possibilities. In the words of one of Chris’s students in the film: there is a gulf between high luxury and extreme poverty. When we take our students on community service projects to work in areas of extreme poverty, we are introducing them deliberately to a kind of multiculturalism that seeks to broaden and change their ideational systems. And if we have bursary or scholarship programmes in our schools, we need to be extremely sensitive to this, from both sides of the spectrum. Again, this was a topic for considerable concern in my group and the phrase “the pride of being poor” sticks in my mind in this regard.

My second consequence:

If we conceptualise culture as an inner map, a system of ideas inherited from the group, that creates patterns for behaviour, it becomes possible, and desirable, to step outside our own respective cultures in ways that are far more profound than wearing different clothes or learning new languages. We do not need to do this by identifying with another culture – I am thinking more of a critical, interrogative approach that can initiate a cultural civil war within an individual. This is a type of multiculturalism that posits possibilities that are not visible to the majority in the cultural group and in this way can change culture by redefining its landscape and space.

As educators, these possibilities for changing behaviour through intervention in idea systems should interest us greatly. In my own life, I remember vividly entering such a phase as a 14 year-old white South African growing up under apartheid. At around that age I knew that I was uncomfortable with and isolated from my white community. About four years later, I became fluent in articulating this unease. I was opening up for myself a new cultural country.

Here are three stories much more interesting than anything autobiographical. I shall read the first exactly as a journalist reported it. I know that some of you will recognise it:

Mukhtaran Bibi lives in Meerwala, a 12-hour drive southeast of Islamabad. In June 2002, members of a high-status tribe sexually abused one of Mukhtaran's brothers and then tried to cover their trail by falsely accusing him of having an affair with a high-status woman. The village council in Meerwala decided that the punishment for the alleged affair was for high-status men to rape one of the boy's sisters. Mukhtaran was gang-raped by four men and then made to walk home naked in front of 300 villagers.

Mukhtaran was now expected to commit suicide. The usual way of doing this is to swallow pesticide. A woman in Mukhtaran's position is utterly disgraced, has no semblance of honour and is expected to do away with herself.

But Mukhtaran refused. She propounded the revolutionary thought that the fault lay with the rapists, not with her. The rapists are now awaiting a sentence of death and Mukhtaran has been presented by President Musharraf with a cheque for just over \$8000 and round-the-clock police protection.

What has Mukhtaran done with the money – built two schools in her village, of course, one for girls and the other for boys. She has said that education is the best way to affect social change. The girls' school is named after Mukhtaran and she herself is now studying in its fourth grade class.

Mukhtaran's story has moved on since this short article was written in 2004. It would be fine for us in Global Connections to try to establish contact with her and her two schools.

Peter and Linda Biehl, two Californians, moved as great a distance through their internal multicultural journey. Their daughter Amy, a Fulbright Scholar, went to Cape Town to assist with the first open elections in South Africa in 1994. One morning during the build-up to this momentous day Amy was in a car with some black friends from the University of Cape Town. They drove into an incident of violent civil unrest and Amy was dragged from the car and killed. Four black youths were convicted of this killing and imprisoned. Faced with this enormous loss in their lives, Amy's parents decided to enshrine the memory of their daughter and the ideals that she cherished in the Amy Biehl Foundation, which they established to

initiate innovative community service and self-help projects in deprived areas around Cape Town. When the four young men convicted of killing their daughter appeared before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Biehls argued for their amnesty. I brought Peter and Linda Biehl to Deerfield Academy when I worked there in the academic year 1999/2000. The Deerfield students were astonished by this story and incredulous when Amy's parents told how they now employed two of these young men in the work of the Foundation and would share meals with them from time to time. Through discovering in themselves a forgiveness of ample proportions, the Biehls had moved right away from the essentially retributive view of justice in their culture to embrace the restorative justice exemplified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The most astonishing of my three stories is recounted by Philip Gourevitz in his compelling account of the genocide in Rwanda: *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families*. Right at the end of his book, Gourevitz tells a tale which symbolises for him the possibility of hope for the future of Rwanda. The account is of a Hutu attack on two schools by Hutu militants:

During their attack on the school in Gisenyi, as in the earlier attack on the school in Kibuye, the students, teenage girls, were ordered to separate themselves – Hutus from Tutsis. But the students had refused. At both schools, the girls said they were simply Rwandans, so they were beaten and shot indiscriminately.

Rwandans have no need – no room in their corpse-crowded imaginations – for more martyrs. None of us does. But mightn't we all take some courage from the example of those brave Hutu girls who could have chosen to live, but chose instead to call themselves Rwandans?

What an amazing multicultural leap of faith, terminal faith, this was.

These are all stories of a kind of inner multiculturalism, of a movement within but outside one's culture to a new cultural space. They all entail judgement of the culture of one's birth. And they all demonstrate an internal dialectic, a tension that drives the culture forward. This type of multiculturalism is one way in which cultures change, and advance.

My third consequence:

Learning how to judge one's own culture can open the way more generally for judgements about the respective values of different cultures.

In a world where liberal-minded people like us find it hard to break out of the trap of cultural relativism, it is necessary to remind ourselves that some judgements have to be made. Yes, oh dear yes, we judge all the time, no doubt far too frequently, but there are nevertheless times when it is necessary and vital to do so.

Skip said on Monday: "All cultures are of equal value in the sense that human beings are". This is true but it does not mean that all values within a particular culture are of equal value nor does it mean that one cannot rule authoritatively that some values across cultures are better than others.

It is easier, I think, to see this if one looks back through the lens of history. Slavery is an obvious one to pick up – perhaps too obvious. So let me choose cannibalism instead. I am indebted to my friend George Walker, Director General of the International Baccalaureate Organisation, for this example from Montaigne. In his wonderfully sympathetic and generous essay entitled *On the Cannibals* and written in the 16th century, Montaigne feels that he has to condemn the native Brazilians' practice of eating human flesh. He says: "It does not sadden me that we should note the horrible barbarity in a practice such as theirs: what does sadden me is that, while judging correctly of their wrongdoings we should be so blind to our own."

How do we pass judgement on aspects of the cultures of others? What allows us to? Yet we do and we must. And a large part of the ability to make these judgements with a jurisprudential delicacy and even-handedness is to try to open our eyes to the inevitable shortcomings in our own, native cultures. The matter of intercultural judgement is sensitive and we have shied away from it this week, I think. But it is not something about which we can bury our heads in the sand.

Arising from a working definition of culture as an ideational system that defines patterns for behaviour instead of describing patterns of behaviour, I have considered some unusual types of multiculturalism, looked at examples of standing outside one's own culture as a type of multiculturalism and raised the delicate matter of intercultural judgements. Now, finally, I want to conclude with some remarks about the impulse to generosity that should, I

believe, govern multicultural enterprises. When I welcomed you all on Sunday night, before dinner, I suggested that part of Peter's legacy to our treasure that we call Global Connections was an impulse to an open and warm generosity. It is this spirit that moves the most unlikely multicultural enterprises.

Skip suggested, on Monday, that "groups in power are not multicultural by nature". He is most certainly right in this general assertion, although there have been some significant exceptions to it. Dominant cultures and ideational systems need to understand their innate multicultural reluctance and to take on board the responsibility to make generous sacrifices in coming to multicultural affiliations. I feel more and more that there is a need to educate dominant cultural groupings, wherever they are, to seize the initiative and to seek to make sacrifices. We need to give up a fixation with our own ideational systems and seek to look through the lenses of others.

Throughout the past few days you have shown a desire to feed these ideas back into your school communities and also to pay proper attention to minority cultural groups in your school communities: I suggest that this task is really urgent and that it requires huge generosity. Please let's go away from here and make our school communities as fully multicultural as possible.

Remember that to change the world, in ways small and big, we must start doing new things and we must also stop doing some things that are habitual. One of those to stop is the complacency to rest within our own cultures. We must go out and seek new understandings, embracings and celebrations. And we must be generous in doing so. That is the way to the other side of the mirror and to seeing ourselves accurately through the eyes of others.

Let me go back one more final time to Monday. Skip said in that fine opening address that global connections and multiculturalism are virtually synonymous. Take out the virtually. If we wish to be true global citizens, we need to open up our idea and knowledge systems, we need to become epistemologically flexible, we need to expand our cultural intelligence. And we need to start now and do it quickly.

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