

Editorial

In April 2011, scholars from more than twenty countries all around the world gathered at Södertörn University [1] located in the southern suburbs of Stockholm in Sweden, for a conference titled *Intercultural versus critical education: Contrast or concordance?* The convention was organised by the local Department of Education, in co-operation with the UK based International Association for Intercultural Education (IAIE). The Keynote speakers were Emeritus Professor Jagdish S. Gundara from the Institute of Education, University of London, who also holds a UNESCO Chair in Intercultural Studies and Teacher Education, and Professor Peter McLaren, of the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and a leading scholar in the field of critical pedagogy/education.

As we all know, intercultural and critical education both have a long tradition in educational research. This conference aimed at maintaining the ongoing exchange of ideas on intercultural and critical education. The conference themes revisited well known educational concepts such as multicultural, transcultural and intercultural (education) that have developed around the world in response to recent changes in traditions and cultural contexts. While intercultural research is an outcome of increased migration and globalisation, research on critical education traditionally deals with the study of class differences and social equity inquiry. In contrast, concepts such as inequality, marginalisation and exclusion are interchangeably addressed in intercultural and critical educational scholarship. Therefore, a central focus of the conference was the exploration of various distinctions made between intercultural and critical education. The conference had three main themes: a) Inclusion-exclusion (race, ethnicity, class, language and gender), b) Peace, conflict and intercultural communication, and c) Globalisation and cosmopolitanism. The articles presented in this Special Issue of IIER are a small selection of the papers presented at this conference. Another selection of articles will appear in a Special Issue of the journal *Intercultural Education*. Before presenting the articles for this Special Issue however, we would like to give a brief background in order to situate a national context for this conference.

The public image of Sweden generally has been implicitly understood as a monolingual and monocultural country and as such different to other countries in Europe (Municio, 2001). This image, however is open to deconstruction. The historical diversity and aligned confrontations that national minorities have suffered in Sweden throughout history are still today silenced in the public discourse. This has had far reaching consequences for the socioeconomic, educational and linguistic state of the minorities. 'Under-communication' (sic) of ethnic identity (Eriksen, 2000), language loss, and high drop-out rates from school are examples that have been a sober reality for many (cf. von Brömssen & Rodell Olgaç, 2010).

A welcome change at a national policy level however, took place in the beginning of the year 2000, when Sweden ratified the Framework *Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, including the population the Sámi, Tornedalers, Sweden-Finns, Roma and Jews as official national minorities in the constitution. The ratification of the

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages further recognises Sámi, Finnish, Meän kieli, Romani chib and Jiddish as constitutional minority languages. As one consequence of the ratifications, the national school curricula was reformed and now includes content about the cultures, languages, histories and religions of the five national minorities. The national reform has however, not been fully implemented in practice and there is a discrepancy between policy and practice (DO, 2008). In addition, although the Sámi represent the indigenous population of the country, Sweden has until today not recognised the ILO Convention No. 169 which enforces, specifically the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples.

The five recognised national minorities are very much transnational. One of the explanations for this is a shifting of national borders in the neighbouring Nordic countries over historical periods. Furthermore, linguistically there are commonalities between the countries as Swedish, Norwegian and Danish are related languages and speakers of these languages are usually able to understand each other without effort. Finnish however, belongs to the Finno-Ugric language family and therefore differs from the Scandinavian languages. Finland-Swedish was the language of power during six hundred years of Swedish dominion in Finland, when Sweden and Finland comprised one country. As a consequence, many Finns were and still are bilingual in both Finnish and Swedish. In 1809, Sweden lost Finland to Russia and became the autonomous Grand-Duchy of the Russian Empire and remained thus until its independence in 1917. Denmark also included Norway until 1814, whereupon Sweden and Norway formed a union until 1905.

Today *Sápmi*, the Sámi indigenous area, covers northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and parts of northern Russia. Minorities of Finnish descent reside also in northern Sweden and Norway, *kväner*, and in southern parts of Norway, *skogsfinner*. We find the Romani and Jewish minorities in all the Nordic countries. They are however, not recognised as national minorities in Denmark. Finland also has the oldest Muslim minority within the Nordic countries, the Tartars, who migrated to Finland in the beginning of the 19th century. There is also an old Russian minority in Finland. Iceland does not have any recognised national minorities and immigration has so far been minimal.

As Sweden was 'neutral' during World War II and relatively unaffected by the war, it was able to benefit from rapid socio-economic growth after the war. During the 1950s and 1960s Swedish enterprises began to recruit labour force from various countries in post-war Europe e.g. Italy, former Yugoslavia and Greece, and also from Turkey. With the introduction of a Nordic passport exemption in 1954, large groups of Finns were able to migrate to Sweden. What motivated the migration were the great losses Finland had experienced during WWII compared to its Nordic neighbours. Despite being the only other European nation to have resisted invasion, and perhaps as a result of this, the country was in ruins, and in addition had to cater for many waves of internal incoming refugees from the eastern territories of Karelia that had been lost to the Soviet Union in the peace treaty. Today, the Sweden-Finns group is the largest of the five national minorities in Sweden. Although the historical diversity in Sweden has always been a reality, also in educational contexts, there has been a dominant

monolingual and monocultural discourse and a strong deficit perspective in relation to minority children (Municio, 2001).

In Sweden, the issues concerning intercultural education and critical pedagogy gained incentive in the 1970's due to a sizeable increase in new migrant groups entering the country; this statistic continues to increase until today. At the end of 2011, the population in Sweden was reaching 9.5 million. An important detail concerning statistics on ethnic minorities in Sweden is that they are based on estimations, as Sweden does not allow for census records on the category of ethnicity. According to Statistics Sweden [<http://www.scb.se/>], towards the end of 2010, one fifth (19.1%) of the Swedish population were of foreign background. Those born abroad and those born in Sweden with both parents born abroad are in public records defined as being of foreign background. In 2010, Serbian, Somali, Afghan and Iraqi citizens were the largest asylum seeking groups. Furthermore, 412,960 persons are born in Sweden to both parents born abroad. Today, interestingly, the largest group of people entering the country comprises of returning Swedish citizens. To conclude this brief background, it is safe to state that although Sweden has a small population, the historical minorities and present-day migrations contribute considerably to a linguistically and culturally diverse make up in society. Regardless of this fact, the idea of a monolingual and monocultural nation-state is still considered to be stained by hegemony. The *grand narrative* of a homogenous Sweden is so far excluding the national minorities, migrants and other ethnic groups.

Against this back-drop, the articles presented in this Special Issue represent some of the crucial educational issues at local, national and global levels with relevance for Sweden and elsewhere in the world today. One example of these issues is the need for validation of indigenous people's knowledge. In the first article, Asta Balto and Liv Østmo illustrate the far-reaching consequences of state policies, which as described above, still today promote processes of change for the indigenous population, that is, the Sámis across the Nordic countries. Their article demonstrates ways in which to sensitise and decolonialise conservative views among a group of Norwegian Sámi students. In this course, students' stories were used as a starting point for examining the significance of cultural encounters, to raise the awareness among students and to acknowledge their lived experiences. Their stories were undeniably narratives about experienced collective and individual exclusion and contempt. Balto and Østmo subsequently reflect on how, as researchers, they gradually realised that the courses followed the processes of decolonisation, although this concept had not been an objective.

In the second article, Leslie Bash proposes a theoretical reconsideration of the concept of culture, as he sees a danger with 'culturalism' in its focus on distinct identity formations at the expense of other multiple identities. He argues that multicultural education is still influencing pedagogical practice in an unreflective way. The implication for intercultural education according to Bash is an approach that underscores the local contexts of inter-group relations. He offers a model of intercultural education including reciprocal processes that can be of mutual benefit.

The normative strategy of intercultural education, with its ambition to include diversity of languages and cultures in the curriculum has according to David Coulby made slow progress in Europe, with the discriminating treatment of Romani children in educational contexts as the most conspicuous example. In the third article Coulby draws our attention to the European situation stating that Europe is slowly drifting away from being at the centre of world affairs. He discusses three emerging possibilities of normative strategies; those drawn from Islam, the USA and from China, that might have an important role to play in the next phase of globalisation.

Ulla Damber's article illustrates the complexities of diversity today, not only in Swedish school contexts but also at a global level. Her article concerns equity and models of literacy. Damber observes that second language learners are often stereotyped as low achievers. Teachers and teacher education has a key role and Damber emphasises the need of basic knowledge about second language learning and intercultural sensitivity to be included in teacher education. She concludes by arguing for the potential that the ideological model for literacy has in bringing about those intercultural and critical perspectives that are necessary for achieving equity.

The fifth article by Fokion Georgiadis and Apostolos Zisimos focuses our attention on an urgent and topical current issue in Europe, the educational situation of the Roma. The authors are especially discussing the Roma situation in Greece and the social injustice and exclusion that the Roma meet in schools linking this with the key role that teachers and teacher education has in influencing change. In their article Georgiadis and Zisimos support Freirean critical pedagogy in the sense that they see the task of the teachers as empowering the powerless, in this case the Roma students. In order to reach actual social inclusion of the Roma in educational contexts, the need for enhanced preparation of teachers remains to be implemented. The raising of general consciousness about injustices that the Roma are suffering, not only in Greece but all over the world, is at the forefront of the authors' agenda.

In the following article, Åsa Möller presents an ethnographic case study from a multi-ethnic secondary school in Sweden. The study provides an interesting example of the deficit and compensatory perspective at work pertaining to migrant pupils, regardless of an official intercultural school policy. The richness of the cultural resources that the pupils bring to their schooling are devalued and a form of 'Swedification' is, oftentimes unconsciously, set as the norm by the teachers.

In the final article, Joron Pihl argues that the teaching of library resources has unrecognised potential for contributing to the realisation of intercultural education. Her article provides two examples, one Swedish and one Norwegian, on how this potential might be developed through collaboration between teachers and librarians resulting in educational benefits for students regardless of their background.

It is our sincere hope that the selected articles in this Special Issue will contribute to increased discussions, dialogues, new networks and research concerning critical and intercultural education globally.

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Endnote

[1] Södertörn University was founded in 1996 as a government response to increasing access to higher education among young people in the multicultural southern suburbs of Stockholm. Having a university in geographical vicinity was expected to increase the number of students from this area, which has been achieved during the university's 16 year history.

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