

Multicultural Education.

The Problems of Irreconcilable Differences and Change

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Introduction

The importance of something like multicultural or intercultural education¹ is generally acknowledged. Given the challenges of a globalized world – e.g. the simple fact that people of different races and classes inhabit the same spaces – the point is not so much that education should be involved here, but rather that those involved in education are confronted with the challenges and problems of working within a multicultural setting. What I wish to address in this chapter is the way in which otherness and the other, and hence also the self, are presented within current conceptions of multicultural education, and in some types of research on multicultural education. The characteristic language used here is the language of the importance of getting to know a variety of perspectives, of exposure to alternative discourses, of including a diversity of viewpoints, and also of enrichment of our own way of looking at the world. Sometimes the latter is implied to be the purpose of multicultural education: getting to know e.g. for the purpose of enriching one's way of looking at the world, for the purpose of a better understanding of the world. In the first section of the chapter I will provide several examples that will serve as the point of departure for this analysis. My point is to raise two issues which are insufficiently dealt with in the current discourse: the observation that differences can be irreconcilable and resist any integration into one's own frame of refer-

1 Though there are probably good reasons for distinguishing between these two concepts, I will not do so here, but use them interchangeably. My primary interest here lies in the identification of a currently dominant discourse and not in drawing this distinction.

ence, and the idea of change implied in conceptions of multicultural education. To address these issues, I will make use of some insights from Stanley Cavell regarding what it means to be initiated into socio-historical and cultural practices. The point here is to bring out a sense of a human being's embeddedness in a form of life that at the same time cuts very deep (i.e. is affectively, even physically anchored) and is incomplete (i.e. there is an irreducible, though unidentifiable lack). Again by drawing on Cavell, the theme of voice (and what is involved in owning a voice) will be briefly developed. In the final part of this chapter I will turn to multicultural education again and set to work (the metaphor of) voice in connection to it.

Ways of Thinking and Speaking about Multicultural Education

(1) Recently, Schultz et al. reported on a 2-year ethnographic study about an urban-focused teacher education program. Against the background of massive retention of teachers in urban areas, the researchers wanted to investigate (part of) the problem of how teacher education programs can address the challenges of teaching students from a wide diversity of classes and races; in other words, how teachers can be prepared „for teaching a wide range of racial and ethnic groups in the highly regulated conditions that typify urban classrooms today“ (Schultz et al. 2008: 159). Their particular focus was „to investigate how new teachers enacted a listening stance that was introduced in their preparation program“ (ibid.: 155). This is not the place to go into the details of this research. Here it suffices to briefly point out the main conclusion and to draw attention to the ways in which the cultural other is presented.

The most important conclusion of this research concerns the necessity of teaching negotiation. The researchers argue that it is important „to help new teachers learn to negotiate the many complex and sometimes competing practices that arise from their varied experiences with schools and schooling“ (ibid.: 182). Understanding this process of negotiation, they argue, „is critical for preparing new teachers to teach in urban districts. Without this understanding, we introduce students to new stances and practices without giving them the support they need to enact them in a politically charged and dynamic school environment“ (ibid.: 182). The researchers add that it is important „to explicitly teach new teachers how to negotiate all the competing sets of beliefs – including their own – that they will encounter in their early years of teaching“ (ibid.: 182). They add, however, that it is not necessary to teach new teachers „to resolve the dilemmas or choose between the competing beliefs, but rather to hold these beliefs in tension and manage them as they respond, with deep knowledge, to the situations that arise in practice“ (ibid.: 183).

A crucial part of this teacher training program was a so-called listening stance. The researchers provide an in-depth explanation what this listening stance entails, and mention, among other things, that this listening across cultural boundaries allows „student teachers to develop deeper understandings of their students“ (ibid.: 161). Students, they argue, „are asked to look beyond their own understandings at the same time that they examine their own histories and cultural lenses to uncover blind spots and biases“ (ibid.: 162). Obviously, this seems to be important, but I already want to draw attention to the fact that the cultural other is being presented here from the point of view of the incompleteness of one’s own perspective. Learning from their students, by listening to them, can „bring considerable strengths and assets to their [teachers’] schooling“ (ibid.: 182). What is furthermore emphasized is the importance of integrating „that knowledge deeply into the curriculum through interdisciplinary projects such as literature studies and inquiry-based science or social studies units“ (ibid.: 182).

(2) Consider another example, the content of the course ‚Intercultural education‘, a course that is part of a BA-program teacher training (level: pre-school):

In this module we try to offer a way of thinking and working that is ‚intercultural‘: the module has only few traditional teaching hours, but is a study route consisting of sessions which challenge one’s personal learning process as well as the learning process of the group. During this study route a variety of issues related to the multicultural society as well as to intercultural education and learning are dealt with. This will be done through activities and methods which focus as much as possible on the interaction between the participants and also use the diversity present in the group to their advantage.

Experiencing multicultural situations, listening actively to relevant testimony, actively supporting toddlers in a ‚black‘ school, working cooperatively, reflecting on one’s own and other’s feelings, attitudes, opinions, reactions and behaviour, and acquiring insight into intercultural communication and education will all be part of the module.²

Clearly the idea here is not just to teach future pre-school (or kindergarten) teachers about diversity and multiculturalism, but to let them experience it themselves, in some of its forms. Here the language is that of hearing multiple voices and of experiencing diversity, of being initiated into a variety of perspectives. The real confrontation with (aspects of) other cultures – so to speak the confrontation with real otherness rather than with the otherness one is only taught about – here is deemed to be an indispensable part of good

2 Vgl. http://www.khleuven.be/index.php?page=397&khl_ooiid=2902 (15.2.08), my transl.

teacher training (at least with respect to this issue). The important connection to be made here is that between this kind of experiencing and the idea of awakening a particular attitude. It is specifically stressed that ‚Intercultural education‘ „is not a separate course, but is about a way of thinking and acting in the day-to-day reality of the school“ (ibid.). And one has to embark on a journey (route) of experience in order to appropriate that way of thinking and acting.

(3) The same type of language is also used by Mal Leicester when she discusses the need for an antiracist multicultural approach in higher education (vgl. Leicester 1993). For Leicester, multicultural education involves „an individual’s initiation into a variety of cultural perspectives (to enable wider synthesising possibilities in developing individual meaning perspectives) and the enrichment of our collective understandings through ongoing cross-cultural dialogue“ (Leicester 1993: 103, 1986: 253).

The crucial concepts are those of a meaning perspective and perspective transformation; concepts she borrows from Mezirow (vgl. Leicester 1993 and 1997). According to Leicester, an individual adult learner „undergoes an emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how one’s meaning perspective structures experience and how, through reflection, one transforms the perspective to assimilate new experience“ (Leicester 1997: 459). A meaning perspective here is defined as „the structure of assumptions that constitutes one’s frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of an experience“ (Leicester 1993: 24/1997: 459). Through emancipatory education such a meaning perspective can be changed. According to Leicester the kind of anti-racist multicultural education she envisions can invigorate such an emancipatory process with adult learners such as „to allow a more inclusive, discriminatory and integrative understanding of one’s experience“ (Leicester 1993: 25), eventually even leading „to *superior* perspectives – that is, perspectives better able to make sense of more and different experiences“ (ibid.). In other words, the imperative to initiate/being initiated into a wide variety of cultural perspectives serves the purpose of developing a better perspective on the world.

This understanding of multicultural education is backed up by an epistemological position which she calls „limited relativism“ and that combines „the normative potential of modernism (better/worse; good/bad; true/false) with the flexibility of postmodernism (plurality of perspective; no for-closure; blurring of boundaries)“ (Leicester 2000: 79). This does not imply a rejection of objective knowledge. Against the background of the postmodernist critique of knowledge as the apprehension of an ahistoric and neutral reality, we can, Leicester suggests, keep hold of the concept of objective knowledge if the apprehension of knowledge is understood in constructivist terms. Objective

knowledge is a constructed body of knowledge – constructed, that is, collectively by representatives of all cultural groups (vgl. 1993: 73/75).

What underlies this account of constructed knowledge is a particular reading of Wittgenstein's ideas of agreement in judgments and of justification. Leicester seems to have in mind a literal account of the concept of construction, i.e. people coming together and collectively constructing knowledge. Furthermore, what underlies this is a primacy of the subject (of subjective experience, of subjective ‚meaning‘) over the intersubjective. According to Leicester, learner and teacher ought to engage „in ‚critical discourse‘ to arrive at a consensual assessment of the justification of an idea“ (Leicester 1993: 25). Within this process, „[i]ntersubjective agreement provides an objective reference point in a subjective process,“ she argues (ibid.). Intersubjectivity only comes in after the subjective process of meaning-making has already taken place. Applied to cultural groups, this means that each group is understood as having its own truth and as bringing that truth into the intercultural dialogue for the purpose of the construction of (what then should be called) objective knowledge.

It is also important to mention briefly how Leicester understands justification in this context. Drawing on Wittgenstein, Leicester writes: „Justification comes to an end and rests on a bedrock of those ultimate values by which we justify our judgments. These basic values, being ultimate and justificatory, cannot themselves be justified“ (Leicester 1993: 3).

These basic values are: „[E]thical commitments to racial justice, to the equal rights of every individual, to academic freedom and to the worth of pursuing knowledge and understanding for their own sake“ (ibid.). Leicester uses Wittgenstein's concept of justification in terms of the identification of foundations. There are identifiable substantive contents that are, to use an expression of Michael Williams, „fitted to play the role of terminating points for chains of justification“ (Williams 2001: 83). Justification here is taken in terms of what Williams calls „substantive foundationalism“, the view „that there are beliefs of certain broad kinds, identifiable by their distinctive content, with which justification always comes to an end“ (ibid.: 83).

This is reflected in the language Leicester uses to speak of multicultural education. For example, what needs to be represented by the academic body of higher education is „a greater range of perspectives“ (Leicester 1993: 73). Or alternatively, objective knowledge resembles something like a synthesis: „Through the synthesis of elements from different cultural traditions, new forms of knowledge will emerge over time. The possibility of cultural synthesis multiplies the developmental and transformational epistemological possibilities“ (ibid.: 80).

In higher education it is important, therefore, that „we find ways of hearing the full range of narratives“ (ibid.: 104). Students courses, e.g., should

„mirror the diversity of socio-political and cultural experiences of different ethnic groups“ (ibid.: 33). Or multicultural education „calls for teachers who are drawn from the various cultural traditions“ (Leicester 1986: 254). What is implicated here is that a cultural group can only be adequately represented by a representative of that group: „Academics cannot become the voice of the oppressed. People represent their own interests best“ (Leicester 1993: 85).

These are just a few examples, but I think they can be fairly said to be representative of a currently dominant way of thinking and speaking about multicultural education. Undoubtedly, there are more. The issues that are mentioned and the way in which these are put: all of this seems to be very straightforward. Obviously, it is important to do this, given the challenges of contemporary globalization. Nevertheless, some questions can be raised. It is e.g. not always (if not: almost never) clear what kind of concept of ‚culture‘ is used here. Most of the time, it seems, that ‚culture‘ is understood as something that is internally relatively homogeneous and something which, from an outsider’s standpoint, forms a relatively closed ‚island‘ that has its own uniqueness it should not be allowed to lose.³ Similarly, it is not exactly clear what respect for another culture amounts to (it seems to be presupposed that we know what respect is and, generalizing from that, that we know then what respect for another culture is). What to think of when, e.g. someone refuses, out of religious beliefs, to let his wife be treated by a male gynecologist? What does respect for the other culture mean here? How do we react when confronted with, e.g. cliterodectomy? Or with polygamy? Furthermore, what kind of experience is it that seems to be so important in relation to multicultural understanding? (What is the importance of embarking on that study route? Again, embarking on a study route instead of just taking a course is something that sounds very plausible in the current educational discourse). What kind of knowledge is supposed to be generated by these kinds of experiences? And what about diversity? How is diversity to be understood? How are we to deal with the worldwide revival, during the last few decades, of what we could call identity movements? (Cf. tribal wars in Africa, the war in former Yugoslavia, the rise of extreme right-wing parties in central Europe, the political conflict between Flanders and Wallonia in Belgium etc.).

These are a lot of questions and issues, which I will not be able to deal with, let alone provide an answer to, within the scope of this chapter. Allow me to focus by spelling out what I think are two important issues that are either left out or insufficiently developed in the examples presented. First, nothing is said about the fact *that differences can be irreconcilable* (and what this implies for multicultural education). Put differently, sometimes differences resist any easy integration into one’s picture of the world, into that better

3 I am drawing on Visker (2005a: 34) here.

perspective Leicester, e.g. is hoping to see developed. What is not developed sufficiently is the distinction between, on the one hand, the idea that we can (rationally) understand practices which are alien to our own (understand the reasons for something), on the one hand, and the observation that these practices are at the same time incapable of bringing conviction, on the other (vgl. Visker 2005b). This distinction at least urges us to problematize any talk about synthesis. It also invites us to reconsider notions of intercultural dialogue and communication. Second, not much is said about (the idea of) *change*. Multicultural understanding is mostly put in terms of a culture's own and unique identity. This often tends to make it an 'either/or'-matter, i.e. that of preserving versus giving up one's own cultural identity. This has largely to do, I suspect, with the fact that multicultural education is mostly put in terms of getting acquainted with, learning about and from, etc. Putting it this way, what is left out is the idea of change, more specifically a kind of change that goes beyond a discussion of either preserving or giving up one's cultural identity. Addressing both these issues is important, I think; for the danger is that otherness (and self-ness) gets exoticized. Accordingly, multicultural education stands in danger of becoming a mere rattling off of plurality.

The (Incomplete) Depth of Our Embeddedness

The purpose of this part is to rehearse some familiar concepts regarding what it means to be embedded in (or initiated into) particular socio-historical and cultural practices. In the second section of this part I will go into the deep sense of this being embedded by drawing on Cavell. As I see it, this serves to 'explain' why we are capable of rationally understanding other practices while at the same time feeling that these practices are incapable of bringing conviction. It also shows that this is not something to be deplored; rather it exposes what makes us human. In the third section of this part I will show how Cavell brings out the idea that this being embedded, though it cuts deep, is not absolute, but, so to speak, incomplete (without implying that it can somehow be made complete). The importance of owning a voice (having an expressed existence) will be discussed in this connection, as well as a more dynamic reading of the idea of justification than the one provided by Leicester. The point is to bring out a sense of our human condition as one that invites us to expose ourselves and to reorient ourselves (by an investigation of ourselves). This will, in turn, allow us to speak of change beyond the discourse of preservation versus abandonment of cultural identity. But first I will briefly go into Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein, and, more particularly, how he understands skepticism to be inherent to the human condition, as a way of providing a more general background to the discussion I am going into here.

Cavell on Wittgenstein and Skepticism

Contrary to how Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen* are quite commonly read, Cavell does not take Wittgenstein as either rebutting or flatly endorsing skepticism. According to Cavell, Wittgenstein

does not negate the concluding thesis of skepticism, that we do not know with certainty of the existence of the external world. On the contrary, Wittgenstein, as I read him, rather affirms that thesis, or rather takes it as *undeniable*, and so shifts its weight (Cavell 1979: 45).

This shift is one in which skepticism gets an existential weight, rather than being an epistemological challenge. For Wittgenstein, Cavell argues, skepticism has a truth of its own, something Cavell even refers to as a moral (vgl. Cavell 1979: 47, 241, 448). One way in which Cavell puts this truth or moral is by saying that „our natural relation to the world's existence is [...] closer, or more intimate, than the ideas of believing and knowing are made to convey“ (Cavell in Mulhall 1996: 257).

If anything is under attack in Wittgenstein's *Untersuchungen*, it is not skepticism, Cavell argues, but „ways of arriving at the certainty of our lives, pictures of closeness and connection, that themselves deny the conditions of closeness“ (Cavell in Mulhall 1996: 331) – the very closeness and intimacy that mark for Cavell our relation to the world and others in it. Skepticism betrays itself (or is recognized) first and foremost, then, as a particular attitude. This attitude is understood by Cavell most characteristically as an attitude of disappointment in or dissatisfaction with our ordinary ways of expressing our knowledge about the world and other minds. It is the expression of „the human disappointment with human knowledge“ (Cavell 1979: 44). Skepticism presents itself as the intellectual interpretation of an existential fear which can be understood in terms of a fear about whether anything means what we think it means (vgl. Bearn 1997). It is recognized in the attitude of someone who is tempted to go further than „(what presents itself to him as) the merely conventional limits of knowledge“ (Cavell 1988: 57).

This brings what we normally understand by skepticism (and what is generally associated with it, such as relativism and nihilism), on the one hand, and dogmatism (and what is generally associated with it, such as universalism and absolutism), on the other, under the same denominator. For Cavell, skeptical doubt and dogmatism are alike in their repudiation of ordinary language. Both the attempt to metaphysically align one's ordinary concepts to something in the nature of things as well as the questioning stance that continually undercuts the understanding provided by our ordinary concepts count as skepticism for Cavell. In both cases what is essentially an existential threat is con-

verted into an intellectual problem. In Cavell's reading, the skeptic's demand for certainty is a way of intellectualizing the sense „that meaning might evaporate“, as Standish puts it (Standish 2002: 16). Dogmatism, then, is the intellectual attempt to dispel that fear by trying to fix the relation between mind (language) and world by resorting to universals, or, in Wittgensteinian language, to superlative facts (vgl. Wittgenstein 1953: # 192). Epistemological skepticism, on the other hand, is the intellectual denial of such an attempt. Both intellectual instances fail to address the existential undertones.

It is important to emphasize that one's disappointment in or dissatisfaction with one's criteria is not a mistake. Rather, what we are facing here is a powerful habit that forces us to approach things in a particular way. In Cavell's idiom, this disappointment is part of our human condition. It is there, somehow to be taken care of, but not to be denied. Put differently, skepticism is inherently interwoven with the fact of using language. The fact that we cannot help but use language to express the world and ourselves saddles us with a feeling of being left with a kind of generality that we feel we cannot do without, but that at the same time confronts us with the uncomfortable feeling that it is an insufficient means of expression. The question of something deeper, more essential than is expressed in language, then, arises naturally. As Cavell puts it: „The dissatisfaction with one's human powers of expression produces a sense that words, to reveal the word, must carry more deeply than our agreement or attunements in criteria will negotiate“ (Cavell 1988: 60). In a state of philosophical bewilderment, language seems to present itself to us as an „opaque screen“ (vgl. Kaufman 2002) blocking our access to the world and others in it. The crucial issue is to see that this does not mean that we are off-track then, but that this is a natural possibility of the human condition. Cavell repeatedly stresses that „a mark of the natural in natural language is its capacity to repudiate itself, to find arbitrary, or merely conventional, the lines laid down for its words by our agreement in criteria, our attunement with one another“ (Cavell 1988: 48). In this sense, we come to see that, as he further adds, „the threat of skepticism is a natural or inevitable presentiment of the human mind“ (ibid.: 48).

The real difficulty this points to, then, is not the problem of refuting skepticism, but rather to give it a place in our lives, to change our attitude – something Cavell develops in terms of the theme of acknowledgement rather than in terms of knowledge. Cavell reads Wittgenstein's return to the ordinary as a continual struggle with skepticism. Cavell conceives of this as a kind of „spiritual struggle“ (Cavell in Mulhall 1996: 325), more particularly as „a struggle with the contrary depths of oneself“ (ibid.: 326). The *Philosophische Untersuchungen* express (at least) two voices – both Wittgenstein's – which are irreconcilable, Cavell says: the voice of temptation and the voice of correctness (ibid.: 326; vgl. Cavell 1990: 83). The voice of temptation is meta-

physical and skeptical. It is the voice that expresses dissatisfaction with the ordinary, that speaks outside language-games, that can be characterized, in some sense, as „vanity“ (Cavell 1990: 83). The voice of correctness represents the ordinary, it is a voice that speaks inside language-games, and that in this sense can be characterized as exemplifying „humility“ (ibid.). It is the voice that expresses satisfaction in the ordinary. Importantly, this „struggle with the contrary depths of oneself“ is not one which can be settled, rather, it is more a matter of continually „oscillating between vanity and humility“ (ibid.). The sort of attitude we are to assume here then, is, as I take it, something like a willingness to live (on) the very oscillation of the two voices. Resting on either one of the sides constitutes a denial of this internal conflict and is perhaps representable as the human mind in a state of pathology.

The Depth of Our Embeddedness

Until now I have only loosely referred to the idea of „agreement in judgments“ (Wittgenstein 1953: §§241-242), or, as Cavell sometimes also calls this, attunement. With respect to the discussion on multicultural education I am trying to go into here it is important to develop this a little further; for the sense of embeddedness that Cavell brings out in his understanding of this agreement allows me to address the first issue I want to go into – the fact that differences can be irreconcilable and resist being integrated into one’s picture of the world.

For Cavell, it is a misunderstanding to conceive of this agreement in judgments as a kind of constructivism or a kind of contractualism. This would take agreement as meaning agreement ‚about‘ something, at the same time implying that what one agrees ‚about‘ can be fairly easily altered. Agreement is not a matter of convention, of *mere* convention, for, as Cavell puts it, „no current idea of ‚convention‘ could seem to do the work that words do“ (Cavell 1979: 31). Rather, what ‚agreement‘ conveys is that the nature of a human being’s initiation into a community is not one of coming to agree about things but one of entering into agreements „that were in effect before our participation in them“ (Cavell 1988: 40). It points to „a background of pervasive and systematic agreements among us, which we had not realized, or had not known we realize“ (Cavell 1979: 30). Agreement entails the conditions of what it makes sense to say. Cavell uses the concept of ‚condition‘ in the sense of its derivation, the Latin *condire*, talking together, which, as he adds, is connected with the public, the objective (Cavell 1988: 39). Condition does not point to some arbitrary condition or situation, in which human beings can or cannot find themselves in. Human beings agree *in* forms of life, *in* judgments: „That a group of human beings *stimmen* in their language *überein* says, so to speak, that they are mutually voiced with respect to it, mutually *attuned* top to bot-

tom“ (Cavell 1979: 32). Condition, as talking together, points to what constitutes us as the human beings we are, and also, in its active sense, to what we are prepared to take responsibility for. As Cavell puts this, conditions are „terms, stipulations that define the nature and limits of an agreement, or the relations between parties, persons, or groups“ (Cavell 1988: 39). They mark the boundaries of meaningful speech.

The normativity involved should not be underestimated. A group of individuals does not decide or construct what is normative: rather, individuals *grow into* normativity. Being initiated into practices is not just about learning to use language, it is being *led into* the totality of agreement of judgments which make up the world for us, which ‚determine‘ what is true and false, beautiful and ugly, good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate, just and unjust, green or red etc. Wittgenstein speaks of this normativity as „the hardness of the soft“ (Wittgenstein 1961: 44e). By this he means to convey that what seems at the outset to be rather ‚soft‘, i.e. merely human agreements, cultural and social accretions, linguistic valuations, something which we can (supposedly) oppose to the hard data of biology, of genetic destiny,⁴ is in fact deeply constitutive of the way we see, understand, feel about the world. Wittgensteinian agreements are, we could say, embodied. As agreements they are not articulated; they show themselves in what we say and do, in how we speak and act, in how we feel. Cavell expresses this by suggesting that our human nature is culture (Cavell 1979: 110-111).

Nietzsche’s way of expressing the embodiedness of one’s inheritance can be helpful here: „... behind feelings there stand judgments and evaluations which we inherit in the form of feelings (inclinations, aversions)“ (Nietzsche 1982: #35). Being initiated into particular practices, as coming to enter into a totality of agreements in judgments, is acknowledging that valuations become part of us in the shape of feelings. Education as initiation is coming to *feel* in a particular way, it involves not so much in-corporation as rather something like a process of em-bodying.

Given this account of a human being’s initiation into a form of life, it is not hard to imagine that one can understand the reasons for someone doing something, in the sense of being able to see the place of what the other is doing in his or her frame of reference, while this is at the same time incapable of bringing conviction, something which can be exhibited in a perceived lack of openness towards the other (vgl. Visker 2005b). We may *understand* practices which are alien to our own, but at the same time fail to show openness to those practices. Moreover, it also allows us to see that one’s failure to show openness is not necessarily a lack of willingness to show such openness (vgl.

4 I am drawing on a passage from Sheridan Hough (1997: 13) who uses this line of argument on Nietzsche, but which I find applies equally well to Wittgenstein.

ibid.). Being initiated into a form of life does not only mean being bestowed with ways of understanding the world, but also being bestowed with ways of reacting that are far from only skin-deep. This is not to be taken as an occasion (or rather excuse) to fall back upon oneself as the final ground, affirming that the way one feels and perceives the world is the only correct way, but rather as an occasion (or invitation) to expose oneself. I will explain this in the next section.

Change

Given the embodiedness of our inheritance, it is also not difficult to imagine that genuine change is something which should not be underestimated, for it seems primarily to involve coming to feel differently. Or as Cavell puts it, „a turning of our natural reactions,“ a conversion which „is symbolized as re-birth“ (Cavell 1979: 125). The incentive to change, however, resides in our very embeddedness. There is an openness, so to speak, in our condition of being embedded which has to do with the fact that our relation to our inheritance is not a closed or determined one.

According to Cavell's understanding of Wittgenstein, there is an ambivalence in the way human beings possess language. In his famous ‚bewitchment-passage‘, Wittgenstein says: „Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language“ (Wittgenstein 1953: # 109). Cavell, perceptively, alludes to an ambivalence of the „by“ in this sentence. „[Wittgenstein] is not there naming language simply (perhaps not at all) as the efficient cause of philosophical grief,“ Cavell argues, „but as the medium of its dispelling“ (Cavell in Mulhall 1996: 337). The very thing which causes philosophical problems is at the same time the means by which we, on Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein, ought to deal with them. That our relation to language is one of submission – referring to the fact of initiation – does not mean that one is determined by it. We are, Cavell argues, the victims of the very words of which we are at the same time the masters (Cavell 1988: 169). We are, on the one hand, subject *to* expression (vgl. *ibid.*: 40), but on the other and at the same time, subject *of* expression – which is as much as saying that we are only subject *by* expression. Our being initiated in a human community inevitably puts us for the accomplished fact of having to accept a means of expression which is not our own (at least, not initially). Not that there could be a means of expression which is (or originates in) its own. We are initiated into a given set of meanings, which is sustained by a community, and which we not only are compelled to use to express what is ‚our own‘, but which relevantly constitutes what is mostly ‚our own‘. It is at this (perhaps inexpressible) point that it makes sense to speak of a certain openness. Cavell puts this as follows:

Our relation to our language – to the fact that we are subject to expression and comprehension, victims of meaning – is accordingly a key to our sense of our distance from our lives, of our sense of the alien, of ourselves as alien to ourselves, thus alienated (ibid.: 40).

Our relation to language is one of owning what is alien, whereby we do not own what constitutes what is ‚our own‘. Hence the sense of distance is a sense without in fact ‚knowing‘ what we are distanced from – it is as though we feel like saying „I sense something I know not what“.

One type of response to this is to understand our language as somehow an insufficient means for expression, hence something to be repudiated. As already mentioned, for Cavell this is a characteristic skeptical response: an expression of disappointment with our ordinary ways of expressing our knowledge about ourselves, the world and others in it. Both the attempt to overthrow language (in search for something better, more certain) and the complacent-ironic acceptance of its (attributed) insufficiency are cases of skepticism. However, trying to repudiate language in this way (or as explained above, trying to refute skepticism) exemplifies for Cavell a „wish to deny one’s humanity“ (Cavell 1979: 109), or put differently, a failure to accept human finitude – though, to be sure, the very fact of wanting to repudiate or refute is human-all-too-human as well. A beautiful passage in *In Quest of the Ordinary* summarizes this as follows:

The dissatisfaction with one’s human powers of expression produces a sense that words, to reveal the world, must carry more deeply than our agreements or attunements in criteria will negotiate. How we first deprive words of their communal possession and then magically and fearfully attempt by ourselves to overcome this deprivation of ourselves by ourselves, is a way of telling the story of skepticism (Cavell 1988: 60).

Elsewhere, Cavell puts this by saying that what is wished for here is not to speak anymore, but to let the words speak for themselves: „It is as though we try to get the world to provide answers in a way which is independent of our responsibility for *claiming* something to be so [...]“ (Cavell 1979: 216).

In a sense, this amounts to saying that we lose ourselves (our selves). What is implied in how Cavell puts a human being’s relation to language is that if we wish to exist as human beings – if, that is, we wish to make ourselves intelligible – we must ourselves actively make use of the meanings that we are initiated into or bestowed with. It is only by doing so that we give ourselves a voice in that community. Hammer expresses the point succinctly: „[...] [W]ithout words and deeds and expressions with which we actively insert ourselves in a common human world and respond to other’s responses to us, we would have no full existence as distinct human beings“ (Hammer

2002: 67). A human existence is expressed existence. Furthermore, assuming responsibility for the words we express and mean is not just speaking for ourselves; it is at the same time presenting ourselves as an exemplar of the community we are initiated in, by virtue of the simple fact that we are employing meanings which are shared in a community. Having a voice is going on intelligibly with our concepts.

The important point now is to see what Cavell calls this „sense of the alien, of ourselves as alien to ourselves, thus alienated“ as an invitation to expression, as, so to speak, the drive behind expression. Though, as indicated, it could easily be an occasion for complacency or for an affirmation of one’s way of feeling and perceiving the world as the only correct one, finding oneself as simultaneously deeply embedded and alienated is an invitation to have a full existence, to express what is most ‚our own‘, to own a voice, or better, to try to discover „which among the voices contending to express your nature are ones for you to own here, now“ (Cavell 1990: xxxvi). If anything, the invitation to speak is an invitation to expose oneself, to let oneself be exposed.

There is a relevant connection here with a different understanding of justification than the one provided by Leicester (vgl. above). Here is what Wittgenstein says – a passage to which Cavell refers to as Wittgenstein’s „scene of instruction“ (Cavell 1990: 71/2005: 112-113/203-204):

If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: „This is simply what I do“ (Wittgenstein 1953: # 217).

One way of reading this is taking Wittgenstein’s saying „This is simply what I do“ as an indication of a *terminus* (of discussion, of dialogue, of teaching). This is, Cavell argues, the way in which Saul Kripke (vgl. Kripke 1982) reads this passage. Kripke „takes the teacher’s (or speaker’s) gesture of showing what he does to be meant as a show of power, a political gesture [...], speaking for the community and its settlements, demanding agreement, threatening exclusion, as if the subtext of the demonstration is: Do it my way or suffer the consequences“ (Cavell 2005: 113). Contrary to this reading, Cavell reads this as showing „readiness – (unconditional) willingness – to continue presenting [oneself] as an example, as the representative of the community into which the child is being, let me say, invited and initiated“ (Cavell 1990: 72). When one’s justifications are exhausted, one is thrown back upon oneself, „This is simply what I do“ does not, then, necessarily mark a terminating of all dialogue, but is an expression of showing the ground one occupies, hence also an act of exposing oneself (one’s self as representative of a community) to the other. „When my reasons come to an end and I am thrown back upon myself“, Cavell argues, „I can use the occasion to go over the ground I had hitherto

thought foregone“ (Cavell 1979: 124-125). When Wittgenstein’s passage is read in the context of a relation to oneself, it might even perhaps be read as acknowledging otherness in oneself. „This is simply what I do“ is, then, an expression of our sense of ourselves as alien to ourselves, as alienated. Either way, „if I discover resistance, I might shift my ground, or take a new approach, or blast my way through, or exclude this site and this block from my plans altogether“ (ibid.: 82). Cavell’s suggestion is to try to cover different ground, to try to put our spade elsewhere, perhaps doing something altogether unexpected. „This is simply what I do“ can thus be understood as a site of (the possibility of) critique, of change, of resistance, of newness. We could take it as on occasion to reorient ourselves (hence also take this as the beginning of reorienting the community we are taking ourselves to be representatives of).

Multicultural Education: Voice and Otherness

Let me try to bring this back to (a conception of) multicultural education. One issue I would like to address is that in connection to the deep sense of embeddedness presented above the theme of voice can be set to work in terms of one’s conditions of meaningful speech, and that this, in turn, allows us to re-think what can be involved in dialogue and communication. That is, an individual’s voice (or by extension the voice of an ethnic group) is not aptly understood as the expression of highly personal self-constructed meanings, but should be conceived of as the active revelation of the conditions of intelligibility that this individual takes to be authoritative. The important point here is to acknowledge the intrinsic relations with other meanings, with other conditions of intelligibility. In other words, what is a ‚new‘ meaning or a ‚highly personal‘ meaning is in a relevant sense ‚constrained‘ by this being interrelated with other meanings and conditions of intelligibility. This is not to be deplored, on the contrary; it is to be welcomed as the condition of comprehensibility. Leicester’s demand; e.g. that people should speak for themselves is in a relevant sense – strange as this may sound at first – a denial of voice rather than an enabling of it. A framework in which justifications function as terminating points and in which people are understood to represent their own interests best, could run the risk of drifting into what can be called a purely particularistic recording of cultural voices⁵ in which otherness gets exoticized and interpersonal and cultural differences stand in danger of being polarized. What is jeopardized here is the possibility of letting the different voices, and the interests they express, count as voices worthwhile to take into considera-

5 Here I adopt the expression „purely particularistic mapping of culture“ from Susan Bordo (1988: 629).

tion, or as interests worthwhile to pursue. Actualities of power – for instance mechanisms of suppression – stand at risk of being obscured here, of escaping attention. The other side of the same coin here is that this constitutes a convenient evasion of what Cavell calls the real difficulty of coming to know another person (vgl. Cavell 1979: 90). The humanness of the difficulty involved in understanding each other, of the fact that we sometimes do not understand each other, is simply ignored – that is, not recognized as a difficulty. At the same time this is, in effect, an evasion of the possibility that I might have to investigate myself. Multicultural education might turn out to be something more like work on the self than it is recognizing or learning from the other.

Contrarily, a conception of voice as the active revelation of conditions one always already finds oneself in, heightens the sense of there always being something that is shared with and by others. The theme of voice here does not serve to mark positions – mine against yours. Rather, when we are inclined to say „This is simply what we do“, what is meant here is an expression of those very conditions of what we find intelligible, hence not a terminating point of discussion but rather an invitation, to ourselves and others, for further description of the kind of creatures we are. Importantly, the description meant here is not one driven by a hope that accumulating the revealed cultural layers will in the end provide us with some kind of multicultural synthesis. Rather it is description driven by the hope for initiating a practice of critical dialogue in the sense of letting voices *count*. (Accordingly it is description driven by the hope that a concern for future action takes primacy over a worry about foundations of knowledge.)

This is not to deny that initiating students into a variety of cultural perspectives in order to deepen their understanding is a sensible thing to do. Nor is it denied here that drawing teachers from various cultural backgrounds can be helpful for the purpose of confronting students with a variety of cultural perspectives. Rather, by trying to unlock the fixation on mirroring the diversity of experiences and meanings of different cultural groups, the idea is to enrich the concept of initiation with a sufficient sense of dynamics. Recognizing the ‚incomplete depth‘ of our embeddedness is a way of urging us to see the need to expose ourselves, to take the differences of voices not as places where we part from one another – you against me, each having her or his own truth – but as signposts to return to ourselves.

The return to ourselves involved here is not a return that is helpfully (or even meaningfully) phrased either in terms of giving up one’s cultural identity (as, e.g. implied in the demand for a synthesis of elements from different cultural traditions, or as, e.g. implied when conflating the distinction between ‚being able to rationally understand‘ and ‚being convinced‘) or in terms of affirming one’s cultural identity (e.g. out of a fear that contact with influences from other cultures might make one lose one’s own self). The kind of change

involved in this return goes beyond this either/or of preserving versus giving up one's cultural identity, since what one is invited to explore is precisely that what makes us who we are. One is invited to answer the question 'Who am I that this should be how I react/feel, that this should be what I do?'. In this sense, multicultural education can be an appropriate site for resistance. To be sure, this is not resistance as a kind of societal activism. Rather, what is at stake here is perhaps best understood as a turn inward, a turn to oneself, to how we are „merged into the history of the culture that produced us“.⁶ Or, to use Cavell's way of putting this, it can be a possible site „to confront the culture with itself, along the lines in which it meets in me“ (Cavell 1979: 125).

There are implications for the curriculum here, which come down to trying to overcome the following difficulty. Clearly, the multicultural critique of a one-sidedly informed curriculum (which in a worst case scenario would imply that there is one best way to represent the world), is justified. We might put this point by saying that such a curriculum fails to account for (or fails to acknowledge) that sense of the alien (Cavell mentions) in our ways of grasping the world and others in it. The difficulty, however, is that a counter-movement, in order to account for this criticism, can easily fall into the same trap, namely when it shifts the weight to make way in the curriculum for exemplifications of the idea of uniquely cultured selves. The otherness of the other then tends to be treated as something which can accommodate for what is interpreted as a state of one's own contemporary incompleteness, as it were to fill the gap.⁷ Here the otherness of the other is affirmed in its absolute uniqueness, with its own truth (separated from mine), while at the same time one's own sense of the alien is dissipated. A good example is the discourse which allows the other the status of an interesting possibility, someone we cannot ignore because we can learn from him/her (vgl. Visker 2005a: 50). Consider, e.g. the following definition of diversity, provided during a training session on diversity (as part of the process of implementing a diversity policy in a university):

Diversity is making use of the qualities, talents, experience and competencies of all participants, while taking into account differences between individuals and between groups within a company or organisation. Each employee has her own, unique combination of visible and less visible characteristics (Dala 2008: hand-out, my transl.).

Granted, this definition is provided within the context of an organization of such as a university – though speaking of a university as an organization is already something worthy of drawing attention to – but I want to emphasize that diversity is defined here in such a way that the otherness of the other can

6 Paraphrase of Hough (1997: 101).

7 I owe this insight to Visker (2005a).

appear here in a very specific, already interpreted way. This is not to imply that, at least in my view, the otherness of the other could somehow appear uninterpreted, but just to point out the specificity with which this occurs here: the other can only appear here insofar as she/he is someone whom we can learn from, someone „who confronts us with ‚alternative possibilities‘“ (Visker 2005a: 46, my transl.). The challenge for a curriculum in multicultural education is to give the cultural other a place without placing it (which could mean, e.g. accepting other cultural contents as something that confronts us with our own borders). The following passage by Cavell regarding Wittgenstein’s scene of instruction referred to above, brings the important issues together:

[T]he little myth of instruction strikes me as asking that we take crises or limits of learning case by case, asking ourselves how important it is that we agree, and how thoroughly, in various strains of our form or forms of life, and where we may, or can, or ought to, or must, tolerate differences, even perhaps be drawn to change *our* lives – or suffer the consequences (Cavell 2005: 204).

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