

Can Intercultural Education Contribute to Equal Opportunities?

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Abstract

Intercultural education (IE), a concept used in Europe since the mid-1970s, is currently defined by many scholars as a comprehensive educational approach. Firstly, IE is meant to address all students, and not only those who are seen as different from a given cultural or ethnic majority or social group. Secondly, IE is concerned not only about acknowledging cultural or ethnic differences and integrating minorities or migrants, but also about recognizing, respecting and including all facets of diversity. Thirdly, it is difficult to conceive of implementing IE in school systems which are not comprehensive, but which practice early selection and tracking. Indeed, empirical comparative data reveal that in many countries, certain social and ethnic groups do not have equal opportunities in education, even if IE (or a similar concept) is declared a policy goal and is included in curricular guidelines. The question then remains: Can intercultural education (or an education committed to an inclusive treatment of diversity) contribute to improved educational opportunities and higher achievement? In pursuing possible responses to this question, this presentation analyzes structural and curricular conditions conducive to IE as well as putting forth examples of best practice.