

Reflecting upon the issue of diversity in education

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Webinar: Welcoming newly arrived refugees in the classroom



European Toolkit
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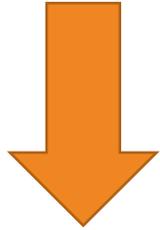
The ungrateful refugee: 'We have no debt to repay' – Dina Nayery*

In 1985, when I was six years old, my family left our home in Isfahan for several months to live in London. The move was temporary, a half-hearted stab at emigration; nonetheless, I was enrolled in school. In Iran I had only attended nursery, never school, and I spoke only Farsi.

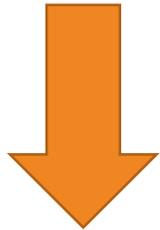
At first, the children were welcoming, teaching me English words using toys and pictures, but within days the atmosphere around me had changed. Years later, I figured that this must have been how long it took them to tell their parents about the Iranian kid. After that, a group of boys met me in the yard each morning and, pretending to play, pummelled me in the stomach. They followed me in the playground and shouted gibberish, laughing at my dumbfounded looks. A few weeks later, two older boys pushed my hand into a doorjamb and slammed it shut on my little finger, severing it at the first segment. I was rushed to the hospital, carrying a piece of my finger in a paper napkin. The segment was successfully reattached.

* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/04/dina-nayeri-ungrateful-refugee>

Refugee children and young people in education



'Take a step back' and reflect



Diversity in education

Example based on video from Brazil

Focused on medicalization of childhood and education

The teacher sits at her desk and starts reading the names of her students one by one, and describing them:



Júlio – he has mental health issues, he is being treated, I discussed his case with the psychologist, and I didn't understand exactly what is wrong with him, but it's mental health issues.

Décio – his main problem is memory and I think he would need a neurologist, actually many children here would urgently need a neurologist.

Edilson – is another case who needs a professional, perhaps a psychologist to run some tests and figure out what is wrong with him because that boy's mood shifts all the time, it seems like his personality is unstable.

Mauriceia – as I understood, she has some health issues, but she is the type of child who is never going to learn.

Pedro – is very rebellious, he has a very aggressive personality, he is unhappy, angry. I think the problem is the family because I heard that all the family is like that.

.....

Example based on video from Brazil

Main observations about this fictitious and tragicomic situation



- ❑ A tendency of ascribing negative characteristics to each individual pupil.
- ❑ An individual-centred approach, where factors such as medical conditions, personality traits, or family background are used to explain learning difficulties (the possibility of having unengaging classes, an unsafe learning environment, inadequate pedagogical strategies is not even raised).
- ❑ The teacher seems to be seeking an envisioned ‘ideal’ pupil (who does not exist) and deems the others ‘unteachable’. This video is a clear example of failure in acknowledging the diversity of the class.

Diversity in education is:

Most often:

- Cultural diversity (students of different countries, different ethnic groups, who speak different languages).
- Students with different socio-economic backgrounds.

But also:

- Students with different needs.
- Students with different life trajectories.
- Students with different interests, aspirations and dreams.

Deficit views

When the presence of diversity in the classroom is identified (that is not always the case), rather often it becomes a problem that needs to be solved (not always in a such exaggerated way as we saw in the previous example).

Problem-oriented views in which the pupils who differ from the 'ideal' type are seen as carriers of numerous 'deficits' that must be corrected.

This often leads to questionable pedagogical approaches => loss of motivation => school disengagement => dropout / coupled with a 'blame-the-student' perspective.

Assimilation

Deficit views are often linked to assimilation ideals, where the expectation is that pupils who are perceived as different (especially migrant and refugee children) are the ones who need to adapt to the local context, while host educational institutions can simply remain unchanged.

e.g., pupils not speaking the language of teaching; pupils not being familiar with the local academic culture.

A fundamental condition for an institutional switch from assimilationist stances to a multicultural perspective is stopping to regard 'difference as a deficit' (Asmar 2005, 291), and to instead address diversity as an educational resource (Dunne 2013).

The monocultural teacher*

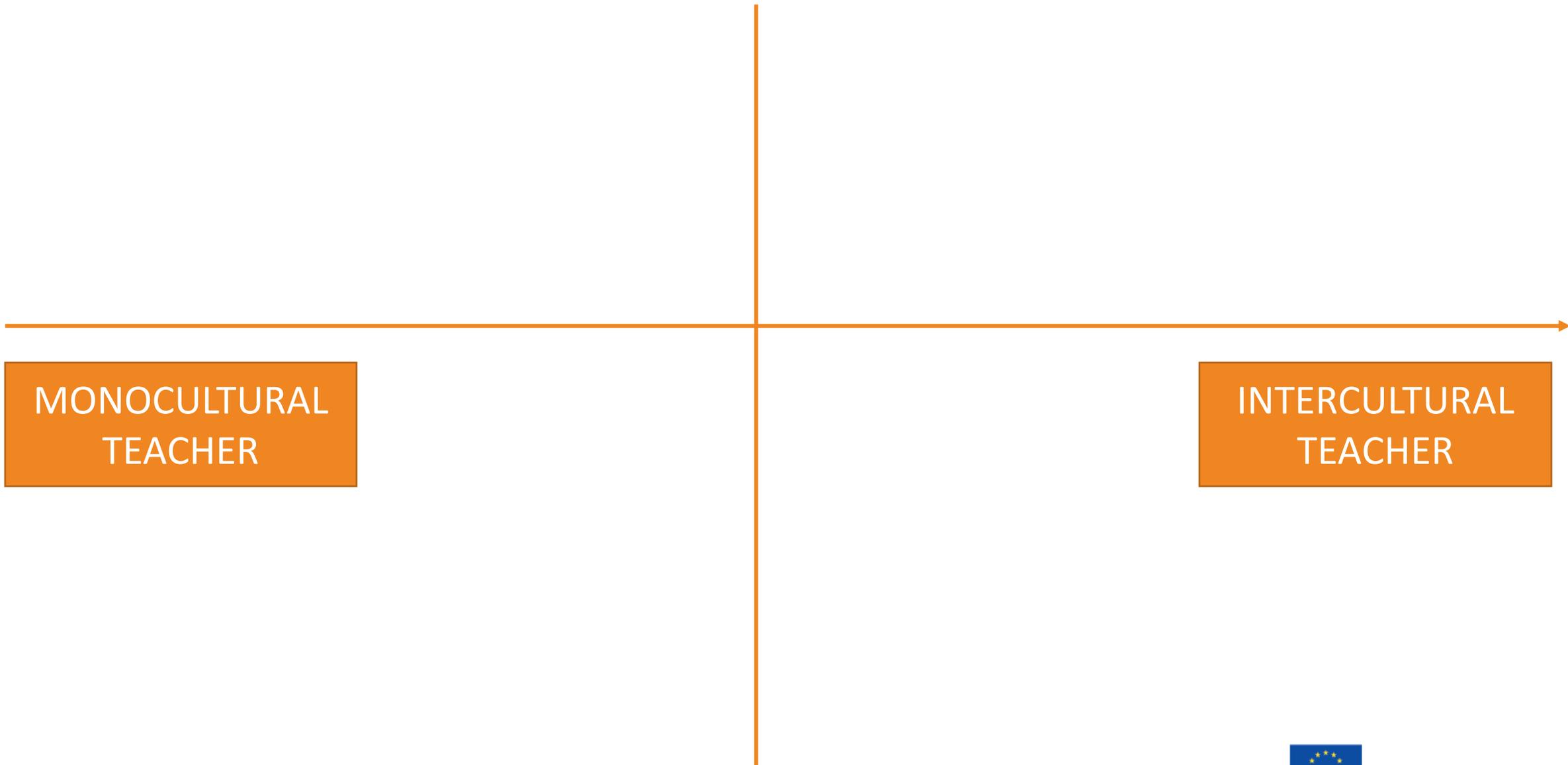
Teacher description	Objectives of education	Theoretical framework
Scientifically competent teacher	Mastering disciplinary content and didactics of the subjects Valuing the acquisition of 'universal' knowledge and cognitive development through learning	School as a neutral field of knowledge acquisition
Teacher as source/transmitter of knowledge; equitable teacher	Designing teaching for the middle point	Representation of students as homogeneous groups
Teacher concerned about students' difficulties	Identifying learning 'handicap' and difficulties	Psychological and biological explanations for difficulties at school
Teacher who contributes to the construction of the 'ideal student'	To use various motivation tools and compensatory formative assessment	Implication for understanding students' existing 'handicaps'

*Based on Stoer & Cortesão (1999)

The intercultural teacher*

Teacher description	Objectives of education	Theoretical framework
Teacher vulnerable to doubt	Shudder the teacher's security. Questioning the causes of more or less positive results obtained by the students.	Valuing the role of the school in the success and failure of students
Teacher able to investigate (socio-cultural characteristics of the context)	Analyse problems arising from power relations at school	Understanding of school as a place of conflictual practices, of intersection of different powers, interests and values
Teacher able to investigate (diversity present in the classroom)	Identify and understand characteristics that inform pupil heterogeneity	Accepting and using difference as a resource
Teacher able to identify and analyse learning problems (researcher/educator)	Question the appropriateness of content and methods and materials to suit the population they work with. Differentiate teaching.	Design flexible work proposals/plans

*Based on Stoer & Cortesão (1999)



How to become an intercultural teacher and welcome refugee children?

Becoming an intercultural teacher is not important only for teachers who have migrant and refugee children in their classrooms. As noted before, even an apparently homogenous classroom is diverse, if we make an effort to notice that diversity.

In other words, leaning towards a more intercultural pedagogy is beneficial for all students, regardless of their migratory background (fosters diversity, respect, communication, citizenship, recognition).

Whilst we acknowledged that diversity is a trait of every classroom – regardless of the migratory background of the pupils – it is important to acknowledge that migrant and especially refugee pupils present particular trajectories and needs.

How to become an intercultural teacher and welcome refugee children?

Migration processes and trajectories are extremely complex and bring several consequences (especially in the case of forced migration) such as confusion or trauma.

Avoid making assumptions: e.g., all refugee children are heavily traumatized and require intensive therapy. Migratory and life trajectories are singular and need to be understood in their complexity. As noted by Franco Ferrarotti (2005), 'a person is never an individual, it would be better to call him/her a singular universe'.

Actively observe and manage peer-to-peer relations, to enhance wellbeing for all.

Be mindful that when implementing an intercultural approach to teaching and learning you might experience resistance (due to wider societal forces such as systemic racism). Whole school approach (intercultural and diversity approaches should go beyond the classroom, including parents, other school actors and the entire educational community).

For more practical examples:
<https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/latest/news/mental-health-refugee-pupils.htm>



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www.schooleducationgateway.eu/europeantoolkitforschools

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