

# Multiculturalism in education and political philosophy

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## Abstract

This paper considers conceptual mismatches between the theories of multicultural education and multicultural political philosophy. Will Kymlicka (2003) has argued that the levels of educational and political implementation might not be unequivocally compatible. From educational perspective, however, it is essential that the state's chosen multicultural policy model reflects the educational reality of schools. At the same time, it is crucial to consider what kind of multicultural ideals the school upholds and promotes. I suggest that philosopher Anne Phillips' (2007) notion of "multiculturalism without culture" could provide a conceptual way to overcome the discontinuities between education and politics.

*Keywords:* multiculturalism, diversity, state, school, education

## Introduction

All liberal, democratic societies are committed to implementing multicultural policies through their commitment to international human rights covenants and to multicultural ideals. These societies have a commitment to provide asylum for refugees, to offer fair conditions of integration for various cultural groups, to respect minority religions, to compensate for present disadvantages of various social groups, to remedy historical injustices committed towards various cultural groups and to prevent cultural bias, prejudice and racism. Even if the school had previously been one of the main instruments of assimilation in all the societies we now call democratic and liberal, nowadays education is often considered to be one of the most important tools to combat prejudice, racism and social inequality as well as a central tool to advance social integration and ascent. Furthermore, the formal, mandatory basic (school) education is often seen as one of the main arenas for children and young people to socialise with students from different cultural backgrounds and thus to learn social skills to manage their lives and thrive in socially and culturally diverse societies. At the same time, the school is also one of the central arenas of multicultural disputes. On a national policy level, decisions must be made on which subjects, topics and languages should be taught at schools, if religious subjects and symbols should be allowed within state-conducted basic education and how strong an influence parents should have on their children's education. At the practical level, schools must make decisions on how they respond to problems such as racism, gender-based prejudices and various social inequalities in every day school life. However, political philosophy has paid surprisingly little attention to children and their education, despite that fact that the issues of children's education have a wider societal and political background and that children's formal education is an integral institution in any society, a part of society's basic structure. Furthermore, as a branch of political philosophy, the theory of liberal multiculturalism has focused mainly on contemplating the just relations between the state and its (adult) citizens.

By contrast, educational theories have long been involved in questions concerning diversity and equality at schools. Pedagogies aimed at managing diversity and levelling down societal inequalities tied to individuals' cultural, social, economic, physical, personal, etc. differences have often been developed

under the name of ‘multicultural education’. However, educational theories on social diversity and multiculturalism have developed without much connection to theories of multiculturalism in political philosophy. Rob Reich has noted that while multicultural educational theory and multicultural liberal philosophy discuss the same issues, these two branches of theory have developed curiously unaware of each other (Reich, 2002, p. 175). This lack of connection is potentially problematic for both theories. In consequence of this misconnection, and because these theories focus mainly on adults, political theories often lack a comprehensive picture of the educational reality of children and young people. Adult-focused political theories are not straightforwardly applicable to children and their education because children differ from adults in the sense that children are considered not yet fully rational and informed beings. Children are dependent on adults in many ways and are thus also vulnerable to adult decision making (Brighouse, 2002). Still, because the future success of any political community depends on the education of future generations, political theories should be able to give at least some guidance on why and how political ideals should be implemented in children’s education (Levinson, 1999).

At the same time, educational practices should follow the *most justified* moral and political ideals. If there is no communication between political and educational theories, it might be impossible to trace political implications and consequences of educational practices. For instance, a fully individualistic educational approach to multiculturalism – an approach that focuses solely on improving individuals’ skills and dispositions, such as language skills or interpersonal skills – conforms to neoliberal views on education. Neoliberal ideologies of education are uninterested in topics of social justice and emphasise the abilities of an individual to compete with others in education and the job market. Intercultural skill can be seen as individuals’ assets in competition for jobs and positions, especially in times of the free movement of capital and the workforce. Neoliberal educators welcome enhancing individuals’ capacities – as long as the underlying moral and political assumptions of the market-driven educational approach are left intact. Even the more social justice-oriented educational approaches can lead us astray, if their background assumptions are not questioned. For instance, a purely identity-based focus on cultural and social recognition might conceal those material inequalities which often go hand-in-hand with social and cultural marginalisation (Kymlicka,

2004, pp. xiv–xv, see also Benhabib, 2002, p. 68). Similarly, educational approaches based on unproblematised group identities can exaggerate or even create differences between sociocultural and religious groups from a young age. Pedagogical practices based on a naïve understanding of ‘culture’ can at worst lead to ethno-cultural stereotyping, treating individuals mainly as representatives of ‘their’ cultural or social group (Reich, 2002, pp. 132, 177–178, 181).

To avoid the unintentional promotion of unjustified political ideas, it is crucial that educational and political theories inform each other. Interaction between two branches of theory does not require unifying terms and perspectives, but the theories should be able to communicate. The most basic condition for theoretical interaction is that the different approaches understand each other’s main terms and concepts. In this paper, I first proceed to question the notion of ‘culture’ in both educational and political theories. One central observation is that social diversity at schools seems to entail the recognition of a wider repertoire of groups than what is traditionally recognised by philosophers of liberal multiculturalism. Thus, political philosophy should take the educational context into account more so if its aim is to provide a sounder theory and more relevant suggestions for educational practice. Second, I study the terminological mismatches between educational theory and political philosophy in general. I conclude that some of the terminological disparities are due to differences in perspectives. However, I also claim that practical implementations of multicultural ideals would benefit from wider interaction between these two theory branches. Last, I suggest that both educational theory and political theory would benefit from a more agent-centred perspective on culture and consider Anne Phillips’s conception of multiculturalism without ‘culture’ as one option for conceptually bridging educational and political theories of multiculturalism.

## The many faces of multiculturalism and the value of ‘culture’

To start with, it is important to separate between the descriptive and normative usage of the term ‘multicultural’. As a description, ‘multicultural’ simply characterises any modern society which is diverse by nature. However, there are various *normative* responses to social and cultural diversity. States that implement

multicultural policies accept a couple of fundamental ideals: that a state is never composed of one nation only and that there is no need for assimilation or a requirement to hide one's ethno-cultural background (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 150). At the minimum, a normative, value-based response to social pluralism entails that no active measures are considered necessary to reduce social diversity and pluralism: the state does not necessarily need to encourage integration but does not need to compensate for any disadvantages caused by minority status, either. A way of executing this kind of minimal response to social diversity would include granting social and cultural groups 'the right to be left alone'. This means that, on the basis of respecting (adult) individuals' freedoms of conscience and association, those social or cultural groups that so wish to would be given the right to live without interference from other sociocultural groups or from the state (Kukathas, 1992, p. 122). However, individuals or groups would not be encouraged or supported to uphold their own culture or customs, either financially or otherwise. Concerning education, Chandran Kukathas suggests that many such groups, such as the Roma in Europe, should be allowed to educate their own children according to their own customs, without being obliged to send their children to schools or any other kind of state-conducted education (Kukathas, 1992, pp. 117, 126–127).

In contrast, according to 'maximal' normative responses to cultural diversity, active measures to maintain or encourage diversity are considered necessary. The range of the active measures employed vary: they can include granting state funding for religious or linguistic groups or even imposing restrictions on group members. For instance, a linguistic group could be compelled to educate their children in a minority language; such is partially the case of the French-speaking minority in Quebec, Canada. This maximal response is sometimes called 'strong multiculturalism', and it is often based on the normative idea of cultures as internally valuable *and* mutually exclusive. Curiously, many nationalistic political currents seem to be based on a similar 'multiculturalist' rationale on the ontology and value of culture – which, according to the nationalist perspective, could then be cherished and contained within the borders of a nation-state.

'Multicultural policy' refers to the common rules various cultural and social groups are to live by within a society. In practice, there are various multicultural policy models, many of which have been created according to purely pragmatic and not by any normative reasons. For instance, a model such as the 'German

model' was 'created' when foreign citizens were inducted into the country as a temporary workforce for purely economic reasons, whereas the 'British model' has its roots in the days of the British Commonwealth. In Germany, the predominantly Turkish foreign workforce was considered to be temporary, the state neither considered their social integration to be important nor offered many opportunities for integration. During the last few decades, this policy model has led to the creation of somewhat isolated migrant subcultures. In Britain, when conflicts occurred between various migrant groups during the 1980s, the chosen state-level solution was to establish and finance these groups' 'own' cultural events and centres. This policy response, which from the governmental perspective was administratively easy and inexpensive, has contributed further to the formation of separate cultural groups within the society (see Malik, 2006).

As liberal societies are based on the moral and legal respect of basic freedoms of expression, conscience and religion and upholding the freedom of speech, they maintain normative diversity at least in the minimal sense. At the same time, it is evident that not every model of multiculturalism encourages liberal values. Multiculturalism in the strongest sense can turn against some fundamental liberal principles if the preservation of cultural *groups* means compromising fundamental individual freedoms and rights. For instance, religious associations might be granted exemption from following state laws, such as in respecting the right to marry. In the same manner, multiculturalism in the weakest sense can leave the most vulnerable groups, such as non-native majority language speakers, refugees and children, without adequate support for integrating and succeeding in society. Therefore, liberal societies should situate themselves somewhere between the two extremes. Liberal democratic societies usually wish to preserve at least some common rules which apply to all individuals in society, even if some communities have been granted partial self-determination rights. The most important principles of liberal societies are individual freedom, equality and justice, which are expressed in the declarations and covenants of human rights embedded in national legislation. One of the more important principles of liberal multiculturalism therefore is respecting everyone's central human rights.

In liberal political philosophy, cultures are considered important because of their significance to *individuals*. Theories of liberal multiculturalism understand the value of culture as both instrumental and individualistic: a culture's value is

defined by its importance to its members. When a culture loses its significance to its members, it also loses its value (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 75; Margalit & Raz, 1995, p. 87). According to liberal multicultural theory, one's culture plays an instrumental part in the person's wellbeing and quality of life. Reflective freedom to live in accordance with our beliefs and values is considered to be a precondition for leading a good life in liberal theory (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 81). An individual's self-respect and feelings of dignity can be strongly tied to their cultural background and relations. Thus, if a person's culture is not generally respected in society, their feelings of self-respect and dignity can be threatened. Public vilification of a cultural group can cause its members to lose their self-confidence and to internalise the negative collective image. In contrast, a flourishing culture can offer its members meaningful relationships, goals and opportunities to identify with and even provide a sense of belonging which is not conditional on achievements or merit (Margalit & Raz, 1995, pp. 84–85, 87; Benhabib, 2002, p. 51).

Education is relevant to any multicultural political model because the development of an individual's reflective freedom to live by their own chosen values requires access to relevant information about cultural choices as well as actual opportunities to make those choices (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 86). However, a comparison between multicultural political theories and multicultural educational theories reveals that despite being of the same topic, these two branches of theory understand their central terms in a very different manner.

### **Conceptual mismatches I: 'Cultural' groups in education and political theory**

Normatively, multicultural and intercultural educational approaches are based on the ideal of educational equality: '...the idea that all students – regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics – should have an equal opportunity to learn in school' (Banks, 2005, p. 3). Multicultural educational theory has been developed in response to the observed personal, socio-economic and cultural differences between pupils and to level out educational inequalities which correlate strongly with these differences. Multicultural educational approaches are concerned with ethnocentrism in education because certain ethno-cultural and social perspectives in education threaten to dominate, bypass or undermine minority perspectives. Culturally biased education can

severely hinder minority individuals' educational success by treating individuals according to stereotypical images – even when education is generally considered to be a central tool for overcoming social inequalities and providing opportunities for socio-economic prosperity. In addition to fighting straightforward racism, sexism and homophobia at school, pedagogical measures include diversifying the curriculum by including histories of minority groups and offering pupils options for learning and interacting with other children and youth with diverse (cultural) backgrounds (Banks, 2005, Introduction; Reich, 2002, pp. 131, 175–176).

Similarly, philosophers of liberal multiculturalism acknowledge that an individual's access to culture is not automatically guaranteed in any liberal society. Cultural dominance can be devastating especially for people with indigenous cultures who have not chosen to live as a minority and who possessed a rich culture of their own before the colonisation of their land. Thus, securing access to culture requires more than upholding individual freedom and liberty. In addition to freedom, active measures of cultural or communal recognition and accommodation are needed. These special protections can include opportunities to study in minority and majority languages, financial support of cultural events and granting certain groups partial self-determination or even the right to full self-governance. According to liberal multicultural theories, these active measures of cultural accommodation are required to guarantee an individual's access to his or her own culture. Furthermore, enough education on cultural issues and values is needed to provide information on cultural choices and to enhance students' reflective capabilities as well as to develop their virtues of tolerance and acceptance (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 86; 2010).

However, multicultural education and multicultural political theory perceive the most relevant 'cultural' groups very differently. Multicultural educational theories consider issues as varied as ethno-cultural groups, such as African-American, Latino, First Nations or indigenous groups, student poverty, gender, class, 'race' and sexual minorities as well as ethnicity, creed, disability and talent (see also e.g. Banks & Banks-McGee, 2005; Reich, 2002, p. 176; Banks 'Series Foreword' in Mayo, 2014). One of the basic tenets of multicultural education has been that everyone has a culture according their group and that cultural differences must be recognised in order to avoid cultural bias in education. This means that teachers must first be aware of their own cultural and social background and how

this background and one's often unarticulated attitudes and biases might influence one's way of teaching and treating pupils and choice of educational materials and topics (Banks, 2005, p. 4; 2014, p. viii).

In contrast to educational theory, liberal multiculturalism focuses almost exclusively on groups of ethnic and indigenous origin, language and religion. Pioneering philosopher of liberal multiculturalism Will Kymlicka recognises in his theory only cultures with an institutional basis. In Kymlicka's model, 'culture' is nearly identical to a nation or state. For instance, he describes the USA as one societal culture, which is dominated by the English-speaking culture (Kymlicka, 1995, pp. 77–78). These 'societal cultures' in Kymlicka's theory include national minorities and indigenous groups as well as immigrant groups (as originating from other societal cultures). In Kymlicka's model, these groups are granted different rights. In his model, indigenous groups are entitled to the most extensive self-determination rights, whereas national minorities, such as minority language groups, would only be granted less extensive rights to partial self-determination or rights to political representation. Immigrant groups would mainly be granted rights to fairer terms of integration (Kymlicka, 2010). Other groups, such as ones based on gender variation, class, sexuality or 'race', Kymlicka defines not as cultural groups but as *social movements* (Kymlicka, 1995, pp. 18, 76–77). Therefore, when applied to education, Kymlicka's theory clearly provides a different idea from what we typically consider to be multicultural education. Learning about the history of different nations or peoples or studying foreign languages would not usually be thought of as multicultural or intercultural education. Rather, learning about world history or learning a new language is usually considered to be an essential part of any liberal or general (basic) education.

Therefore, the first problem in comparing the perspectives of multicultural education on one hand and liberal multiculturalism in the other is that they are clearly talking about different sociocultural groups. It might be that in multicultural educational approaches, the term 'culture' is used too loosely. On what conceptual basis can we consider gender and sexual minorities, people with disabilities or the gifted as 'cultures'? If these groups are considered to be 'cultures' which require recognition and accommodation, what rights should gender minorities or the specially gifted be entitled to as cultural groups, for instance? Would all these various groups be accommodated on a similar moral or

political basis? (compare Song, 2009). Then again, as argued above, multicultural education based on a rigid conception of 'culture' clearly does not suffice as an educational practice when we talk about 'multicultural education'. Multicultural or intercultural education usually aims at developing virtues of tolerance and acceptance of wider social variety than mere 'cultural' diversity.

## **Conceptual mismatches II: Multiculturalism and interculturalism**

One central debate in regard to multiculturalism concerns the terms employed in the discussion. The notion of 'multicultural' has been widely debated in both political philosophy and educational theory as the term itself seems to preserve the idea of cultural groups as separate wholes, which are internally homogenic and somewhat deterministic. The term 'multicultural' seems to imply that there are separate 'cultures' which can exist in a society, side by side in a 'multiple' form, without extensive mutual interaction and following their own legislative rules. Such models of 'mosaic' multiculturalism can be highly problematic especially from the viewpoint of gender equality. For instance, in the case of separate jurisdictions, it is easy to privilege some groups over others, especially the rights of the more powerful (usually older men) over the rights of the less powerful (women, young people and children) (Okin, 1999; Benhabib, 2002; Phillips, 2007, p. 19). Similarly, educational theorists have noted the potentially problematic connotations of the term. What, for instance, would it mean in practice to educate children by 'their own' culture within the same school or society? On the contrary, one of the main aims of school, and citizenship education specifically, is to learn to cope and navigate within socially diverse societies. Furthermore, it is impossible to designate children to one cultural group only. Due to these theoretical and practical problems, multicultural educational approaches tend to emphasise the flexibility and individual nature of one's culture (Erickson, 2005, pp. 32–33, 40–41, 44–45). To underscore the flexibility of cultures and cultural belonging, educational theorists usually prefer terms such as 'cross-' or 'intercultural' education instead of 'multicultural' education. However, there is cultural variation in the use of these terms. The term 'multicultural education' is more often used in Anglo-American contexts, whereas 'intercultural education' is more widely used in European contexts (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2018, pp. 612–

613). Solely changing the main terms does not avoid the conceptual difficulties if the terms' background assumptions are left unanalysed. Furthermore, conceptual mismatches can hinder interdisciplinary cooperation.

Despite the conceptual problems inherent in the term 'multicultural', political theorists still mainly use the term instead of 'intercultural'. The latter term is only sporadically used within the field of *political philosophy* (see the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/search/searcher.py?query=intercultural>). For political philosophers, multiculturalism is first a normative policy model and not a theory about desirable personal attitudes and skills. Liberal multiculturalism takes a stance only on what would be the best normative and political principles of multicultural society. It does not insist on the citizens acquiring a disposition of cultural sensibility or any other intercultural skill (Kymlicka, 2010). In contrast, multicultural or intercultural education aims to influence the pupils' attitudes towards diversity by teaching to accept, navigate with and appreciate the different cultural groups, habits, life-styles, life-choices and personal outlooks, both locally and globally (see Reich, 2002, p. 130; Kymlicka, 2003). Despite the variation in the main concepts, the liberal versions of both multicultural political theory and multicultural educational theory usually share the central tenets of egalitarian liberalism. Both branches of theory believe that the society should aim to level inequalities tied to an individual's personal, social and cultural characteristics. As the school is the main institution responsible for educating the future citizens of society and (at its best) one of the main institutions for bringing about social integration, multicultural political theorists should be interested in education. For the same reasons, multicultural educational theorists should be interested in the political background assumptions and implications of the practices of multicultural education. However, mutual interaction might be difficult if the theories continue to use different terms and notions when addressing the same topics.

One way to solve the mismatch between the use of the terms 'multicultural' and 'intercultural' would simply be to allow them to address different levels of multicultural analysis. Will Kymlicka has suggested that the term 'multicultural' could be reserved for the national and political level only. According to him, the term 'intercultural' should rather be used to address topics at individual or psychological (or educational) levels. Thus, the term multicultural would only

point to the questions of how to ensure the just treatment of all cultural groups within a pluralistic state. In contrast, the notion of ‘intercultural virtues’ would rather describe the qualities and virtues required of a person who is living in a multicultural society. At the minimum, these virtues would include accepting liberal multiculturalism as well as accepting that certain skills are needed in order to live well within a culturally and socially diverse society. The educational process of an intercultural citizen would thus include enhancing the development of positive attitudes towards liberal multiculturalism as well as some essential skills to cope and thrive within diverse societies (Kymlicka, 2003, pp. 147, 154).

Understood as distinct levels of analysis, multiculturalism and interculturalism would, thus, simply provide different perspectives on cultural diversity. However, allowing this would require admitting that these perspectives necessarily stand in a complex and sometimes conflicting relation to each other. When one starts analysis from the individual level, one might end up with quite different practical and political suggestions than when starting analysis from the level of the state and proceeding towards the individual (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 148). For instance, upholding multicultural justice at the state level might require endorsing intercultural cooperation at the local level, such as in cities or municipalities. However, interculturally educated citizens might choose to favour global interculturalism instead of multiculturalism within the borders of a nation-state. Again, in a multicultural state, some groups may prefer to isolate themselves partially from the rest of the society, while in contrast, the implementation of intercultural ideals would demand interaction between individuals and diverse groups and cultures. At its worst, an ideal model of an intercultural citizen can encourage a tokenistic or superficial understanding of culture or emphasise an exaggerated view of cultural differences rather than mutual understanding. Kymlicka remains sceptical that these two perspectives, those of the intercultural citizen and of the multicultural state, could ever be fully compatible (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 166).

If Kymlicka is right – that interculturalism and multiculturalism represent two perspectives of social and cultural diversity – it also seems plausible that intercultural and multicultural education are not interchangeable terms. This is because their background assumptions and implications are different or even mutually exclusive. Would it then ever be possible to create a conceptual bridge

between political ideals and educational practice? If not, will the *political* justification of multicultural or intercultural educational aims ever be possible? In what follows, I claim that Kymlicka's view on the impossibility of bridging the two perspectives, intercultural education and multicultural politics, is too sceptical and that overcoming the mismatch requires a more flexible and individualistic stance on 'culture'.

## Multicultural education without 'culture'?

Are there any ways to overcome these theoretical disparities between multicultural educational and political theories? In the second section I concluded that Kymlicka's theory of liberal multiculturalism seems too robust for giving guidance on education as it does not recognise groups that are relevant to education. Therefore, it would be difficult to provide educational suggestions based on his theory. However, a combination of perspectives on education and political theory would be important for several central reasons. On one hand, without conceptual clarity, educational theories might provide misleading practical suggestions. For instance, if educational methods were based on untenable concepts of race, class and ethnicity, multi- or intercultural approaches in education could therefore contribute to ethno-cultural stereotyping or strengthening racial prejudices (Reich, 2002, pp. 132, 177–178, 181). On the other hand, it would be crucial for educational professionals to understand what kind of normative political models (which versions of multiculturalism or interculturalism) they support by their educational practices. Furthermore, political theories must be informed and aligned with educational questions before they can provide concrete guidance for educational practices (Reich, 2002, p. 88). When political theories lack a stance on education, they also lack a comprehensive perspective on society, which includes education as a basic institution. At the same time, political theories lack an understanding of their own educational presuppositions (Reich, 2002, p. 6; Levinson, 1999, p. 5).

In contrast with political philosophy, educational theories aim to recognise a wide range of social and cultural groups at school. However, these groups are enormously diverse, and thus it is likely not possible to accommodate all these

groups on a similar moral basis (see Song, 2009). However, deliberations on the moral justification for accommodation would be important, especially in situations of scarce resources. If it is not possible to accommodate every possible group, on what moral basis should we choose the ones to be accommodated? There are also ontological questions concerning the qualifications for group membership. Some groups accommodated in theories of multicultural education are defined by referring to certain physical features or mental abilities, whereas qualifications for membership of other groups rely on more 'objective' criteria, such as individuals' mother-tongue or country of origin. Furthermore, the notion of 'culture' is almost exclusively understood in connection with those who tend to 'stand out', i.e. minorities of various kinds, despite the tendency to produce culture generally being a profoundly human feature. In this sense the majority should be no less affected by 'culture' than minorities (Phillips, 2009, pp. 2, 5–6, 57).

However, the tendency of identifying 'culture' with minorities only, together with the deterministic viewpoint on culture, creates situations in which members of minority cultures are frequently characterised solely as representatives of 'their' culture. This tendency, while highly patronising, can also be truly harmful when it is used to undermine individual capability for agency and responsibility and can easily lead to two undesirable results. First, and at the gravest level, the idea of minority members being culturally determined has in some cases led to the acquittal of offenders of serious crimes such as physical abuse or even murder (Okin, 1999). Second, and more commonly, especially girls and young women are often in public discourses depicted as acting from weakness of will or 'false consciousness' when their choices seemingly do not meet the rationale of the majority (Phillips, 2009, p. 38). When minority membership is falsely considered to influence one's rational capacities, it prevents us from appreciating all those decisions which many individuals are compelled to make in between the pressures of minority and majority cultures (Phillips, 2009, pp. 26, 46–47). In practice, the idea that minority girls and young women only possess partial rational capacity has sometimes led to restrictions being issued on minority practices, such as certain dress codes in public spheres. However, these 'blanket restrictions' do not differentiate between those different motivations individuals might have in connection to minority practices. Rather, while it should be acknowledged that the individual's background culture as well as their physical appearance, sex,

gender, socio-economic status, etc. do *shape* perspectives and choices, it must also be granted that those personal features do not *determine* one's viewpoints, abilities or life prospects (Phillips, 2007, p. 127).

Instead of depicting cultures as deterministic wholes, it should be acknowledged that individuals, even members of the same cultural group, give different meanings to 'their' culture. For instance, while some members of a culture might consider their way of living as a *good* way amongst many others, some might consider a particular way of living as simply the *best one*. Most of us probably do not actively think about our culturally influenced habits or customs until we are somehow compelled to think about them – for instance when encountering habits which differ from our own. For some, religion is more important than culture, and in some people's lives, politics rather than culture plays a significant part (Phillips, 2007, p. 52). Phillips stresses that we should be able to understand cultural pressures without assuming that culture dictates. A better understanding of choices made by individuals would entail bearing in mind the different perspectives and values concerning culture: 'In many cases, the issue will be how to differentiate choice from coercion. This has to be approached differently once we drop the misguided understandings of culture' (Phillips, 2009, p. 38).

Phillips suggests that instead of pinpointing certain criteria for group membership, the notion of 'culture' should be understood as being analogous to the concepts of 'gender' or 'class'. This means that even we abandoned essentialist, objectivistic or deterministic definitions of culture, we would not need to abandon the notion altogether. Rather, Phillips calls for a more agent-centred and individualistic understanding of culture. An individualistic stance on culture would better appreciate the rationale behind one's choices and would not depict people as culturally determined. This individualistic perspective would appreciate the individual variety in one's 'culture' as well as conceptually allow social and cultural identities to overlap.

Educationally, what would it mean to embrace Phillips's notion of multiculturalism without 'culture'? First, it would question the usefulness of any 'blanket' restrictions on cultural habits within educational spheres or any other solutions to multicultural disputes which rely more on stereotypical images of minority groups than on adequate deliberations. Second, emphasising the idea of multiculturalism without culture would question those educational approaches

aimed at recognising groups rather than individuals. Rather than considering the needs of specific groups, educational approaches should be developed to better meet the needs of the individuals. Cultural features would still be considered to be important, not as group characteristics but rather as individual qualities. However, the dissolution of 'culture' might not solve the tension between intercultural educational approaches and multicultural policies. Because of its individualistic stance, multiculturalism without 'culture' would be more compatible with intercultural educational approaches. However, the potential tensions between individualistic intercultural education and group-based multicultural policies are not necessarily undesirable. Rather, providing they are morally and politically justified, intercultural and multicultural educational approaches might also help to challenge untenable multicultural policy models.

## Conclusions

When one compares theories on multicultural education and multicultural political philosophy, it soon becomes evident that these two theoretical branches understand social diversity and 'multiculturalism' very differently. In this paper, I observed two main mismatches between theories of liberal multicultural philosophy and multicultural education. First, it seems that liberal multicultural political theory presents a more restricted definition of cultural groups than the theory of multicultural education. At the same time, political theory does not seem to recognise the actual diversity in schools. This diversity includes a significantly wider variety of social groups than what is theorised in political theories. Second, multicultural educational theory and multicultural political theory seem to employ different sets of terminology when addressing the same social and cultural phenomena. For instance, while liberal multiculturalists prefer to address diverse societies as 'multicultural', educational theorists prefer the term 'intercultural'. I claim that these disparities in the central conceptions and terms can lead to problematic misapprehensions if the political concept of multiculturalism is straightforwardly applied to public educational contexts or if the practices of multicultural education are not placed under critical political scrutiny. Both theories would benefit from more substantial mutual interaction.

If the aim of school education is to remedy or overcome societal inequalities, both educational and political theory would benefit from at least some kind of theoretical continuum between the theories. Otherwise, educational and political theories seem to operate in a quite different kind of multicultural society and arrive at dissimilar remedies for social injustices. To overcome these disparities, I suggest that both educational and political theories employ a more agent-centred conception of culture. I propose that Anne Phillips's theory of 'multiculturalism without culture' might assist in conceptually bridging political and educational theories. Phillips's theory emphasises the fact that different individuals accord a different kind of moral weight to 'their' culture. Individuals also employ varying strategies when navigating between the pressures of majority and minority culture. A more nuanced and agent-centred conception of culture appreciates these individual choices and aims to understand the rationale behind them. Embracing this more individualistic notion of culture in liberal multicultural theory would help to include more diversity in the theorising of multicultural society. Moreover, wider interaction between liberal multicultural philosophy and educational theory would help in selecting the most morally justified educational and policy responses to social and cultural diversity.

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