Do we need a plural Pedagogy?
An Identification of some Topics for Research.

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School populations have become increasingly multi-cultural or multi-ethnic, or composed of pupils of different cultural origin or ethnic backgrounds. This is said to be problematic. These problems caused by — or rather attributed to — the plurality of society are usually countered by educational programs like multi-, intercultural or even anti-racist education. Most of the discussions around these developments appear to be centred on the content of these 'all-pervading' changes in education. However, one rarely reads something about pedagogical consequences. Should plurality in the classroom influence the processes of teaching, and the pedagogy that governs these processes? In this contribution I will not try to answer that question. It will identify some research topics allowing us to find parts of an answer to that question.

The first section will introduce in subsections the ideas culture or rather 'cultural behaviour' and cultural differences. These two subsections are followed by a subsection on educational consequences. In a fourth subsection I will identify some topics of research.

The second section will deal with the subject 'ethnicity'. The relation between ethnicity and cultural behaviour is discussed in a first subsection. This discussion is followed by a discussion of ethnicity and cultural dimensions. As in the first section, I will then discuss some of the educational consequences of ethnicity. In the last subsection I will again identify some topics for research.

The third and final section will deal with the main question of this contribution. It will summarise the identified topics of research and discuss how the results of research in this field might contribute to the answer of that main question.

1 Culture and Education

1.2 Culture and cultural Behaviour

Culture is a difficult and complicated phenomenon. Consequently, many social scientists in this field have developed own definitions of culture. Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952) found more than 160 definitions of culture.

In 1949 Douglas G. Haring published a challenging article 'Is “culture” definable?' His answer was negative. In his view one should not try to define culture, he preferred ‘cultural behaviour’. The term ‘culture’ itself forms the main obstacle to a valid definition. We may arrive at a definition inductively based on observation of the phenomena to be classified. The phenomena to observe are human beings behaving, ‘not an artificial dichotomy of “people and their behavior”. The two never occur separately’ (p. 28).

Cultural behavior […] is differentiated from other behavior by the fact that its patterns are learned individually from models provided by other persons. Viewed as cultural, interest centers in the pattern and only incidentally on the behaving organism. Viewed as behavior, interest centers on the fact of learning, the latest fad and traditions of hoary antiquity alike confront the human
neonate or child as completely new ways of acting or thinking to be incorporated into his individual cultural repertory (p. 29).

In this study we will follow Haring and use the term ‘cultural behaviour’. Cultural behaviour is all human behaviour acquired and modified in a group, allowing its members to communicate with each other and to cope with its present and future problems. It consists of a unique whole of behavioural patterns, based on beliefs, values and norms. The past participle ‘acquired’ refers to the importance of learning and is, of course, in our context important. The word ‘modified’ implies the phenomenon of culture change. The second sentence gives a description of the cultural behaviour.

1.2 Cultural Differences

Cultural differences manifest themselves in various forms. Hofstede (1991) distinguished four forms: symbols, heroes, rituals, and values. The first three are observable and subsumed under the term practices.

Symbols are words, gestures, pictures or objects that carry a particular meaning which is only recognised by those who share the culture. (p. 7).

Symbols do not root very deeply in a culture, because they may change or even disappear while new ones come into being. Fashion offers many symbols.

Heroes are persons, alive or dead, real or imaginary, who possess characteristics which are highly valued in a culture and who thus serve as models for behavior. (p. 8).

Mythology is, of course, full of heroes. We can also find heroes in the history of a people as that people see it. The Dutch, for example, have as one of their many heroes William of Orange the ‘Father of the Fatherland’. Modest as he doubtless was, he might get shy and blush when he could hear what beautiful characteristics the Dutch attribute to him. Heroes are less susceptible to change than symbols.

Rituals are collective activities, technically superfluous in reaching desired ends, but which, within a culture, are considered essential: they are therefore carried out for their own sake. (p. 9).

One can observe rituals in everyday life, for example, etiquette concerning laying the table and eating, the way people behave at an official reception, and the cheek rubbing ‘kisses’ exchanged in some cultures when one meets an acquaintance of the opposite sex.

Talking about cultural differences, we usually only think of these practices. This is only understandable. When we start looking at an other culture, the very first thing we notice, is that several customs are different from ours. Other eating habits, other festivities and the like stand out to the alien observer. Many people never come much farther than the observation of these differences in practices. Yet, they only see a part of the other culture.

In Hofstede’s view values form the core of cultural behaviour. ‘Values are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others.’ (p. 8). Hofstede considered them feelings with a positive and a negative side, like good versus evil, honest versus dishonest. Values are not observable. We can only infer them from actions in a prolonged and detailed observation.

Here, Hofstede distinguished between the desirable and the desired, or the norms and the values. Norms are standards for values. The norm is that all of us should be law-abiding citizens. Few people contest this proposition. In practice, however, many consider speeding and ‘modest’ tax evasion to be acceptable behaviour. Here the norm represents what is desired. The value represents the extent to which we abide by the norm.
In the definition of cultural behaviour there was question of coping with the problems the group encounters. In principle, all societies face almost the same basic problems, with which they have to cope. Based on a large world-wide research into values of people working for IBM Hofstede identified the following common problems.

1. Social inequality, including the relationship with authority;
2. The relationship between the individual and the group;
3. The social implications of being born as a man or a woman, concepts of masculinity and femininity; and
4. The ways of dealing with uncertainty, relating to the control of aggression and the expression of emotions. (p. 13/14)

The solutions to these problems were different from society to society. Hofstede found that the data in this research represented four dimensions:

1. **Power distance**
   
   ... the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (p. 28).
   
   The extremes on this dimension are small and large. A large power distance implies considerable inequality in a society, that is not very much contested. A small power distance implies relatively little inequality. As far as it exists it will be contested.

2. **The degree of individualism**

   The two poles on this dimension are individualism and collectivism.
   
   Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family.
   
   Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. (p. 51).

3. **Masculinity–femininity**

   It is not a question of biological differences between men and women, but one of their social roles. Biological factors only partly determine these roles.
   
   Masculinity pertains to societies in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on success whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.
   
   Femininity pertains to societies in which social gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. (p. 82, 83).

4. **Uncertainty avoidance**

   Uncertainty avoidance pertains to the ways of handling ambiguous situations. Uncertainty creates anxiety and human beings have developed ways to alleviate this anxiety by technology, religion, and law. Feelings of uncertainty are, of course, personal experiences. Many of these feelings are shared with other members of the society. They are acquired and learned in the society and can run from weak to strong. ‘Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations’ (p. 113).

Hofstede showed convincingly that it is possible to locate cultures somewhere on these dimensions. The positions and the combinations of the positions on these dimensions may, at least partly, explain the variety of cultures.
1.3 Cultural Differences and educational Consequences

Education is a basic human activity. As we have seen in the definition of cultural behaviour, it is also one of the most important ways in which a culture is transmitted. One cannot but assume that the positions on the cultural dimensions largely influence education and being educated.

For education these positions and their combinations may well be much more essential than the customs, festivities and other practices that are so often considered part and parcel of intercultural education.

Hofstede occasionally mentioned some educational consequences of these dimensions. The dimensions will be shortly discussed mainly in the light of their educational implications and consequences.

**Power distance.** In a culture with a large power distance the distance between teachers and pupils is large. Teachers are a kind of gurus who transfer personal wisdom. They ‘process’ their pupils as raw material into civilised beings. They (have to) take all the initiatives and are to be treated with respect. It stands to reason that pupils or students out of a culture with a large power distance will have problems adapting to an education in a culture with a small power distance where teachers and pupils treat each other more as equals. When one expects a teacher to take the initiatives one may feel insecure or even lost when one has to take initiatives in the class. Pupils coming out of a culture with a small power distance will feel frustrated in schools in a society where the power distance is much larger.

The degree of individualism. In a collectivist society students will not like to speak up in class unless he feels that the group sanctions their speaking up. The solution is to address them personally. Usually, collectivist societies also have large power distances. This makes the educational process to be very teacher-centred. Hofstede suggested that the purpose of education may also be different. An individualist society emphasises learning to learn and sees learning as a lifelong process. A collectivist society puts the emphasis on learning how to do things in order to be a member of society. Here, learning is something done by the young only and a one-time process.

**Masculinity-femininity.** In education the differences are quite clear. In masculine cultures students will try to be noticed in class. There is a strong competition, unless, of course, it is also a collectivist culture. In feminine cultures students will try to be more inconspicuous and to be — at least in theory — more solidary. The masculinity-femininity cultural differences may also influence the choice of subjects by the male and female students.

**Uncertainty avoidance.** A feeling of uncertainty leads to a need for predictability. A strong uncertainty avoidance is often expressed in written and unwritten rules. Also, in countries with a strong uncertainty avoidance, students will not accept teachers who admit that they do not know the answer to a question, something that is acceptable to students in a weak uncertainty avoidance country. Hofstede also pointed out that in weak uncertainty-avoidance cultures teachers are inclined to involve parents in the children’s learning process. Here parents and students can discuss things and openly disagree with the teacher. In countries with a strong uncertainty avoidance, parents can be glad if they are invited to attend a lesson. Discussion and disagreement with the teacher are very rare indeed.

1.4 Topics for Research

The pedagogical implications of the positions on the various cultural dimensions are evident. Yet, as far as I know, there is not much more than the remarks Hofstede made. What seems to be lacking is knowledge about the influence of the position on
these dimensions on education — understood as the educational system — and on teaching and learning and the controlling values and norms that together form the prevailing philosophy of education. This would bring us to the following main topic for research.

What is the measure of influence the positions on the various dimensions have on educating and being educated, on education, teaching, learning and the prevailing philosophy of education?

The five dimensions on each of which numerous positions are possible, will yield a discouraging number of combinations. This necessitates ideal typical descriptions of education, the pedagogy and learning at the extremes of each dimension.

In comparative educational research these descriptions could be validated. Of several cultures we know their positions on these dimensions. So, it should be possible to ascertain to what extent the descriptions match with the actual education, teaching and learning and philosophy of education.

2 Ethnicity and Education

2.1 Ethnicity and cultural Behaviour

Schermerhorn (1978) defined ethnicity as a composite of shared values, beliefs, norms, tastes, consciousness of kind within the group, shared in group memories and loyalties, certain structured relationships within the group and a tendency toward continuity by preferential endogamy. (p. xiv).

The popular assumption that cultural content is the essence of ethnicity is not surprising. Schermerhorn's definition lists several aspects that are generally regarded as cultural content. The cultural content of ethnicity, however, is disputed. Ethnic groups are much more defined by ethnic boundaries, than by cultural content. (Barth, 1969).

Yancey, Ericksen & Juliani (1976) also questioned the importance of cultural content in ethnicity. They found that the assumptions of the importance of a portable heritage that a group brings from one generation and from one place to another are usually untested.

Ethnicity comes into being in the interaction between groups, in intergroup relations. The strongest group usually has the largest say. Consequently, the dominant, or mainstream society, more or less determines the identity or ethnicity of the minority. It does so, based on its perception of the minority's behaviour and way of life. On the other side of the boundary, the minority, has, of course, a certain group identity. Faced with a discriminating dominant, the minority is ill at ease and isolated. Sauceda defined ethnicity as ‘... at its core, ... a complex of styles of behaviour resulting from existential anxiety and fear of isolation’ (Sauceda, 1982, 190).

Looked at from the minority’s side, one is tempted to think that the minority itself largely, if not entirely, determines its ethnicity based on their original cultural behaviour. Ethnicity or group identity, however, has less to do with the original cultural behaviour than with the attributions of the dominant. In this context Gans (1979) pointed out that ethnicity ‘... must be understood as responses to current needs rather than only as departures from past traditions’ (p. 3). Some content of ethnicity is derived from the original cultural behaviour, as, among others, Schermerhorn suggested in his definition of ethnicity. However, the dominant's perceptions of that cultural behaviour, the minority's reactions to discrimination, and the resulting alienation have a large influence. Ethnicity can be understood as that part of a minority's cultural behaviour the discriminating majority allows to survive. In this context it is surprising to see that in the name of intercultural education students in pre-service as well; as in-service teacher education are often visiting the home countries of their countries most
important ethnic minorities. The general idea is then that this will foster a better understanding of their ethnic minority pupils. The benefits of these activities are undeniable. Any visit to another country with a different culture broadens the spiritual horizon, especially, if this visit is mainly concerned with the people and their culture. However, insight in the way ethnicity is brought about, may be a much more efficient, if less interesting and entertaining way to cater to educational needs of ethnic minority pupils.

2.2   Ethnicity and the cultural Dimensions

It may be true, that ethnicity is the surviving part of a minority' cultural behaviour, but the question remains what cultural content “survives” this process of alienation. From the practices some will stay others will have to be changed under the influence of the majority. Norms and values are probably less prone to disappear. They are based on the positions on the cultural dimensions. An important question is here, how long and to what extent will these particular positions on the various cultural dimensions be part and parcel of the ethnicity. Will they remain their original positions on these dimensions or will they slowly move in the direction of the position of the majority? It is conceivable that the original positions on the cultural dimensions are reinforced and may, as it were, even change in order to be more different from the dominant’s culture. These questions become even more interesting if on a given dimension the positions of the ethnic minority and the majority are very different.

Another question is whether in the next generations of the ethnic minority the positions on the cultural dimensions remain more or less the same. If an ethnic minority emancipates in the society it becomes an ethnic group (De Vreede, 1990). Ethnicity then becomes symbolic (Gans, 1979). An interesting question is then if the ethnic group’s position on the various cultural dimensions still differs from the one of the majority in such a way that it may have consequences for education, teaching and learning.

Here again, there is not very much research done in these fields, at least to my knowledge.

As far as the relation between ethnicity and the cultural dimensions is concerned we can identify the following two main topics for research;
1. To what extent are the positions on the cultural dimensions in ethnicity identical with the ones of the culture of origin? Is this different for an ethnic minority and an ethnic group?
2. To what extent does the position on the cultural dimensions in ethnicity change in the following generations?

Ethnicity and Education — Topics for Research

Above, we assumed that the basic cultural differences caused by the various positions on the cultural dimensions will influence the way we learn and teach. As far as ethnicity has cultural content and is related to the cultural dimensions it will very probably also influence the ways of teaching and learning as well as the philosophy of education of the ethnic minority or group. This would imply that — once we have established the positions on the cultural dimensions of the ethnic group or minority — the question formulated in section 1.4 is applicable here.

But there is more. The only reason for the existence of teaching is that it may give rise to learning. Suppose, research proves that cultural and/ or ethnic differences imply differences in the way students learn. My personal experience in Zaire is that will be the case.

Suppose, the prevailing philosophy of education in a society is based on a very small power distance and tending to femininity. Teachers would then run into trouble with
students with a cultural background with a very large power distance tending to and outspoken masculinity. The problem here would then be that the students’ philosophy of education — although hardly verbalised— is widely different, if, indeed not inimical to the teachers’ philosophy of education.

Their task, however, is to teach them, that is to give rise to their learning. This teaching would probably have more effect if they would take their students’ philosophy of education into account, that is if they would teach them in the way their students expect to be taught. This, however, would imply that they would have to use a pedagogy, that is inimical to their philosophy of education. On the other hand insisting on one’s philosophy of education and the students’ adaptation to it, could be seen as forcing them to assimilate. That again, is contrary to what most teachers as people of good will would like to do. This problem has a striking resemblance to the choice between falling in the fire or in the frying pan.

3 Do we need a plural Pedagogy?

Plural education is the generic name for all educational reactions to the plurality of society. One can distinguish four kinds of plural education (De Vreede, 1990). The one that concerns us here is pluralist education, the kind of plural education that favours integration of the ethnic minority. So our question should really be “Do we need a pluralist pedagogy?”

The answer to this question depends on two important sets of facts. In the first place, the policy of education in the mainstream society has to be in favour of pluralist education. This will only be the case if the mainstream society’s policy is one of integration, allowing the ethnic minority to maintain its own identity and to share equitably in the material and non-material goods of society.

Secondly, the answer to this question of the need of a plural pedagogy depends on the answers to the following main questions. Answers that can probably only be given after extensive research.

- To what extent are the positions on the cultural dimensions in ethnicity identical with the ones of the culture of origin? Is this different for an ethnic minority and an ethnic group? The more identical they are the more likely it is that the group’s philosophy of education will be different from the one prevailing in the mainstream society. This will be even more the case if the positions on the various dimensions are very different.

- What is the measure of influence the positions on the various dimensions have on educating and being educated, on education, teaching, learning and the prevailing philosophy of education in both the mainstream society as well as the ethnic minority? If the influence is large we may assume that special pedagogic measures are necessary.

- To what extent and in what direction does the position on the cultural dimensions in ethnicity change in the following generations? This main question is important in order to ascertain that one is “catering” as it were to the educational needs of the group or minority in a way that is acceptable to this group, because it is non inimical to its philosophy of education.

The need of a pluralist pedagogy may well be proportional to the measure in which the mainstream society’s policy is pluralist and the measure of influence of the positions on the various cultural dimensions of both the mainstream society and the ethnic minority or ethnic group.

As always in education things are not as easy as they seem to be. Suppose research shows that an pluralist pedagogy would be just what the doctor ordered. What would then come of all the ideals propagated for pluralist education as an all pervading educational change? Will it be possible to develop a pedagogy catering to the philosophies of education of all parties concerned? The larger the differences the more
difficult this will be. It is entirely conceivable that it is impossible because some important aspects in the philosophies of education of the two groups are inimical to each other. The we would find ourselves in the situation that at least for the time being a special pedagogy for the ethnic minority would be necessary. This would then be an ethnic program (De Vreede, 1990). This would imply what Bullivant (1981) called the pluralist dilemma; a society paying for a group's education that is not oriented on societal cohesion.

The implementation of a plural(ist) pedagogy is a task of teachers. No matter what such a pedagogy would be, one of the important matters is to educate teachers that can implement such a pedagogy. This implies that teacher education makes teachers aware of the cultural dimensions the positions on these dimensions of their culture or ethnicity and the consequences these positions have for teaching and learning and for the philosophy of education prevailing in the mainstream society or the ethnic minority or group. Part and parcel of this teacher education would also be the way ethnicity is brought about and the differences between ethnicity and the original culture.

To cater to the educational needs of the ethnic minority pupils, an obvious solution would be, of course, to appoint teachers out of the ethnic minority to teach the students or pupils of this ethnic minority. The training of these teachers should have a special emphasis on the group’s ethnicity. I do not think that it is wise to “import” teachers from the home country, unless one hopes that the members of this minority will eventually return to their home country. The main reason for this is the difference between the original culture and the ethnicity in the host country. Education paid for by the mainstream society should be oriented on integration in the society and not on an eventual or possible return. This implies that the teacher training of the teachers for the ethnic minority should make them much more aware of the nature and causes of their ethnicity than of the original culture that furnishes some of its content. They also should become very much aware of the nature of the mainstream society’s culture. Not as much in order to enable a smooth assimilation, but rather to enable them to cope with the problems caused by this society for the ethnic minority.

That would enable them to furnish a pluralist education as described by Hessari & Hill (1989)

… [to] enable children to develop towards maturity with the ability to recognize inequality, injustice, racism, stereotypes, prejudice and bias, and […] equips them with the knowledge and skills to help them to challenge and try to change these manifestations when they encounter them in all strata of society (p. 3).

But, how do we teach these things in a way that all children regardless of their cultural or ethnic background can learn them?

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