



# **Education and Upbringing in a Diverse Society: On Local and Universal Values and Virtues**

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# ***Education and Upbringing in a Diverse Society: On Local and Universal Values and Virtues***

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*An extended outline (not to be quoted without permission of the author)*

*Note: this outline gives an overview of the central topics, ideas and concepts that will be explicated and discussed in the lecture. It is intended to give the delegates of the conference a better idea of what the lecture will address.*

## ***Introduction***

Western European countries have changed substantially in the last decades, also with regard to the composition of their inhabitants. Not only is there enormous diversity in the background of groups who immigrated, but under the influence of among others secularization and neoliberalism, the 'indigenous' population has become more individualistic and thereby also more diverse. Sociologists have begun to typify Western European countries as 'superdiverse'.

The question that I will address in the lecture is which values and virtues should be part of the upbringing and education of children and young people to increase the likelihood they will live well together in a diverse society.

In the first section I will explicate the term superdiversity and evaluate the use of the term. In doing this I will pay particular attention to the concept 'identity'. The second section describes three places where children pick up local values that influence their own identity development and the way in which they identify and interact with others within and outside these places, namely the family, communities and the school. I will illustrate when they can be said to be good or bad for children or others. In the third section I will describe two ways of how society can deal with superdiversity and which values and virtues children in those societies need to learn: a) a society or nation can reduce diversity by educating all citizens into a thick common culture with local substantive values and cultivating local national virtues; b) a society can accept the fact of diversity and aim to accommodate this by educating citizens into a thin civic common culture consisting of universal humanistic values, and liberal democratic rights and duties. Adopting the second type of society as the most preferable one as such a society makes possible that people are able to develop their own identity and live their life in a way that is meaningful to them, I introduce one central virtue that all children need to learn, which I call the virtue of the double gaze. I finally return to the school and discuss its special place in educating the double gaze of children. If time permits, I will also address some critical questions regarding the focus on education of children (instead of adults of society).

## ***1. Superdiversity and identity***

Most Western European countries, particularly the big cities, are inhabited by citizens with more than 150 ethnic or national backgrounds. The sociologist Steven Vertovec coined the term 'superdiversity' in 2007 to draw attention to the fact that not only is there an increase in the diversity of ethnic groups that have immigrated into western European countries, but that ethnicity is but one aspect of diversity – migrants also have “differential legal statuses and their concomitant conditions, divergent labour market experiences, discrete configurations of gender and age, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents. The dynamic interaction of these variables is what is meant by ‘superdiversity’” (Vertovec 2007, 1025).

While Vertovec used the term for changes in migration patterns, the term appealed to researchers from different disciplines who began to use it in a wider sense. In this lecture I will use it in a broader sense as well, namely that Western European countries are inhabited by people who differ in various respects, not only in ethnic or cultural background, but also their gender, sexual orientation, intelligence, social status, etc.. And they have different conceptions of the good life with which they identify/that they call their own<sup>1</sup>.

To call Western European countries (super)diverse does not only give a more precise account of state of affairs, it also has the advantage that it takes us away from the exclusive focus on culture (or ethnicity or religion). This is advantageous, because the term multi-cultural has become rather blemished, at least in the Netherlands, but also in other European countries. But more importantly, it avoids the mistake that people can be identified with one aspect of who they are (see for instance Sen, 2006), namely their culture, ethnicity or race.

### *The two sides of identity*

I define identity as those aspects of a person that the person herself or other people regard as being characteristic of her and that have a consistency over time. Which aspects are regarded as being characteristic of a person is influenced by values and these also influence whether the aspect of the person is evaluated positively or negatively. For this the philosopher Charles Taylor uses the metaphor of the horizon – the ideas and ideals of a society or community as to which personal characteristics are to count as important or significant (1992). Thus, in a (super)diverse society, people will value different aspects of themselves and others and evaluate them differently.

As I have noted, people's identity consists of various aspects that are regarded as characteristic of a person. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and David Wong (1993) have made a helpful distinction between five aspects of identity of which 'socially defined group identity' is the most relevant for this lecture. Socially defined group identity is constituted through belonging to groups into which the individual is born or of which she becomes a member in later life and to which general traits are attached. Socially defined groups are for instance gender, race, ethnicity, class or religion. As these characteristics are attributed to groups of persons and not to particular individuals, they are not necessarily recognized by each individual and there may therefore be a gap between the way others characterise a person and the way in which a person

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<sup>1</sup> According to Tariq Modood, the great British scholar on multiculturalism, this one of the conceptions of multiculturalism (2016).

typifies herself. Particularly when socially defined group identity is reified or absolutized by others and the person does not recognise herself in this or is no longer treated as an individual, but as a representative of a group, social interaction may be seriously hindered.

### *Similarity*

A downside of using (super)diversity as the main description of a society is that it gives more attention to the differences between than the similarities of people. Yet, people have much in common as human beings<sup>2</sup>. Firstly, human beings have the same basic needs, among which is the need for food, shelter and security, but also, as the Self-Determination theory of Ryan and Deci (e.g. 2000, 2013) argues and has proven with empirical research around the globe, the need of relatedness (the need to belong as Baumeister and Leary (1995) call it), the need for autonomy and the need for competence (which is understood as the need that one matters and can make a contribution). Secondly, all human beings have the aspiration to lead a happy and flourishing life. To be sure, the way in which people satisfy their needs and what a flourishing life means for individuals is diverse and influenced by the family and communities in which they are raised and grow up, but recognising these similarities has implications for the organisation of society and the way in which people interact with each other.

## **2. Common culture of families, communities and schools**

I will describe three spheres in which adults have the intention to pass on particular values and virtues, i.e. spheres that have an educational intent namely the family, communities and schools. Their common cultures also provide a horizon for children's identity development. I define a common culture as a set of values, traditions and practices that is shared by a group of people that form a more or less cohesive collective that exists for a longer period of time.

In families children acquire local values and are habituated in local virtues (that can both be local interpretations of universal values and virtues) and this is good for their development – they need a common culture for their identity formation and to develop their own value framework. But the common culture of the family can also be detrimental to children, for instance when families are closed and parents raise children with absolute values which prevents children to develop their own value framework that might be different from those of their parents, thus preventing children from living their life from the inside. The values of parents also include the way in which children should interact with other people and groups. And where some families embrace the diversity of society and in which children learn to appreciate the different cultures and respect for people with other social group identities, in other families children pick up ideas of segregation and exclusion, which is obviously detrimental to other people.

Following Bellah, I define a community as consisting of people who share a common culture and who take interest in each other over a longer period of time. Members identify with the community that has a culture that “contain(s) conceptions of character, of what a good person is like, and of the virtues that define such character” (Bellah, 1996, p. 153). Communities can also be beneficial to the sense of belonging

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance Isaiah Berlin: “Intercommunication between cultures in time and space is possible only because what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them” (1990, p. 11).

of children, adolescents and adults. And communities give children the opportunity to learn values and practice virtues in a wider social environment. Yet, communities can have negative sides too. Iris Marion Young (1986) for instance notes that communities that have an expressed identity will logically lead to exclusion and hierarchy and to denying differences among the members of the community and Nel Noddings (1996) suggests that all strong communities have a significant measure of normocentricity, which can lead to both admirable and deplorable results for both members of the community and outsiders.

Schools can be detrimental to children and the values they learn may be detrimental to others: Schools can aim to indoctrinate children, thus leaving no room for children's own identity development; schools can be competitive and therefore appeal to particular aspects of the identity of children that might be detrimental to themselves and others, and schools can contribute to the marginalisation of groups. On the other hand schools can be safe havens for children, give children a sense of belonging and the common culture of the school can be another horizon for children's identity development. And, more importantly for the topic of the lecture, states in Western Europe (at least the UK and the Netherlands) have given schools the responsibility to cultivate children's moral and civic development. Yet, what this responsibility consists of is dependent on the view of the nation with regard to the way in which superdiversity should be dealt with at a national level.

### ***3. Nation's solutions to society's superdiversity and the values and virtues children need to learn***

Societies need to have a common culture as well. This makes possible that people live well together and fosters the allegiance of people to a society (e.g. Raz, 1993). Yet, that a common culture is necessary does not say anything about the content thereof. I will briefly describe two different types of common culture.

(a) Nationalism aims to reduce diversity in society in response to the believed threat to the stability of society, decreased sense of belonging, and perceived decrease of equality of opportunity of all the inhabitants. Nationalism expresses the idea that a society is also a community where people share not only a language but also a history, customs and values that are typical for the particular nation state and thus leads to the normative claim that living together in society requires a substantial substantive common culture and that people should be educated into this common culture so that they see themselves as citizens of for instance the Netherlands instead of subjects of for example Turkey or Morocco.

(b) Another interpretation of a common culture of society, one that aims to respect diversity of the population, is more abstract and formal. It consists of humanistic values, the universal human rights and corresponding duties or universal virtues. This common culture is primarily a civic culture – the way in which people in their role as citizens are expected to act in the civil society and in political and public matters. Joseph Raz's (1993) proposal of the common culture he deems necessary for relatively harmonious cohabitation in a multicultural society, which is a liberal democratic common culture, is a good example. According to him, this common culture consists of three aspects: 1. It requires cultivation of mutual toleration and respect and knowledge of the history and traditions of one's country with all its communities; 2. As citizens will interact in the same economic environment, they need to have similar mathematical, literary, and other skills to be able to participate effectively; 3. As they belong to the same

political society, citizens have to acquire a common political language and common conventions of conduct (p. 188).

Although the liberal democratic values are not universally acknowledged, I believe they do have universal value as they are in theory the best guarantee that the basic needs of all citizens in society (including their need of belonging and recognition) are satisfied and that their identity is respected by others in society.

#### ***4. The double gaze***

There is one virtue that I want to explore further, a virtue that aims to do justice to both similarity of human beings and difference between persons. I call this the virtue of the double gaze which means seeing others as both persons with particular identity (recognition of diversity) and human beings (recognition of sameness) at the same time. The idea of the double gaze is based on Iris Murdoch's concept of attention, which she again has developed upon the ideas of Simone Weil. Murdoch uses attention for the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality (1970, p. 37). As Murdoch has it: "As moral agents we have to try to see justly, to overcome prejudice, to avoid temptation, to control and curb imagination, to direct reflection" (1970, p. 40). Characteristic for the double gaze is that people look carefully; they aim to get a picture of the full identity of another person and at the same time they want to understand which basic needs the other is trying to fulfil in which manner.

I suggest that the double gaze is a universal virtue: it is good for all people to have with respect to all other people. This does not, however, mean that children should learn that they should treat everyone the same. The double gaze is precisely valuable to see when they need to do so and when not. That all children should learn this virtue also means that not every idea about the other or other communities is acceptable, for instance seeing others as profiteers, as infidels, or as elites but also as women, migrants, or homosexuals only does not meet the standard of the double gaze.

The double gaze can be regarded as the beginning or foundation of the virtues that people need to live well in a superdiverse society, both in one's interaction with individuals and groups as well as for political decision taking. Seeing others as persons with a particular identity and as human beings at the same time is a necessary condition for citizens of a highly diverse society that not only aims for tolerance, respect and justice but also wants to be open to the possibility that a common culture can change under the influence of diversity (instead of retreating into a nostalgic nationalism).

#### ***5. The special position of schools***

The virtue of the double gaze, like the other virtues necessary for living well together in a diverse society, can be cultivated in the family and communities and it is good when they are. But as states and citizens cannot be certain that this will be the case, it is necessary that schools do so. And schools are good places where children can learn the virtue of the double gaze, for even in a relatively homogeneous school, pupils and students have different identities, while sharing the same basic needs and desire to live a flourishing life.

In cultivating the virtue of the double gaze, the education of pupils should include attention to:

- a. Local cultures and cultures that are highly prevalent in society, so that they know of the cultures of individuals and communities they encounter and with whom they need to interact in the political arena;
- b. Diversity in aspects of identity and diversity in value attached to these aspects;
- c. Commonality of human beings.

Moreover, teachers can be good models. For, they have to exercise the virtue in their classes as well.

Yet, although I do believe that educating the proposed values and virtues to children will, at least in theory, increase the likelihood that they will live well together in a superdiverse society, I have to end with two qualms to the solution. Firstly education is 'a slow process' and puts the responsibility of countering trends in society on the shoulders of the next generation, while the current generation of adults also needs to take responsibility for the liveability of a diverse society. Secondly, the current climate of western societies is heavily influenced by the market with its economic values that fuels competition and by the media that fuels (irrational) fear of others. It could therefore be asked if the schools and children should be the single addressees of educational initiatives.

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Note that these are the texts that I refer to in the lecture; I have learned from many more, also in the past.