
Education for Peaceful Coexistence: Project DARE and the Pedagogy of Difference



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One of the biggest challenges facing education today concerns the preparation of students to live together with others whose worldviews and ways of life may be different than their own. These differences may be based on culture, language, nationality, religion, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, physical or developmental disability, and more, and they are sources of conflict within societies around the globe. Broadly speaking, two approaches have attempted to address this challenge. One is grounded in American individualism, with roots in classical political liberalism. The other is tied to European cosmopolitanism, drawing on multiculturalism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism. Both approaches presuppose that excellence in education requires initiation into what each calls a critical perspective, although they disagree as to what it means think or behave according to such a perspective. But according to each approach, to be meritorious colleges and universities must accept and excel at teaching and researching its particular concept of criticism. This often excludes the possibility that students can be successful who do not accept or excel at such a conception, for reasons relating to the sorts of differences mentioned previously. This has a tendency to exacerbate rather than

diminish social conflict, the consequences of which abound, from the marginalization of migrants, minorities or people with disabilities to the rise of populism. Project DARE, an Erasmus Key Action II funded consortium of 13 European, Israeli, and Georgian institutions that is celebrating its final meeting at the University of Masaryk this week, has tested a third approach known as 'Pedagogy of Difference.' It is based on the simple idea that to be educated entails coming to understand and appreciate oneself, in terms of the cultural, language, nationality, religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, or physical or developmental disability one has inherited or with which one chooses to affiliate. But to understand and appreciate oneself, one must learn to understand and appreciate others whose worldviews or ways of life may be different than one's own. Such an education offers the possibility of hope for peaceful coexistence across the many differences that divide societies today. After considering some of the problems with the two prevailing approaches, this talk will discuss some of the basic principles of this third orientation and how they have been tried out in Project DARE.