



Multiculturalism

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What is it?

The idea of multiculturalism (and related concepts such as multicultural education or literacy) introduces a social framework for the appreciation and respect of cultural differences in today's societies. In a world where social mobility (both physical and virtual) becomes the norm rather than the exception, the need for appreciation (and celebration) of difference becomes crucial.

Multiculturalism, then, provides a space to discuss what it means to embrace diversity in today's world and how that can help improve social relationships even in the presence of conflicts. Multiculturalism also helps us transcend the idea of "heroes and holidays" that sometimes permeates our views of diversity. Instead, it helps present cultural differences as something complex and rich, not subject to trivialization or stereotypes.

Who uses the concept?

Scholars in education and cultural studies have embraced the concept. Multiculturalism often appears in the discussions of nationalism, migration policies, accommodation and integration of immigrants, and relations between minorities and majorities. In cultural studies, it challenges traditional ideas of nationalism as a worldview and politics that promote the uniformity of culture and society. In education, multiculturalism provides a critique to otherwise neutral views of learning and language, aligning with the view against uniformity proposed in cultural studies.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

The idea of multiculturalism is relevant for multicultural dialogue because it brings attention to changes and trends in societies, cultures, and languages. The idea of opposing traditional notions of nation-state, so germane to multiculturalism, is particularly important in today's society. Multiculturalism as part of intercultural dialogue provides a space to focus on concrete interactions of individual human beings in specific societies.

What work remains?

As society and science continue to evolve, the idea of multiculturalism will be more open to scrutiny. With the emergence of concepts such as interculturalism or superdiversity as complementary and contending terms, any future discussions about multiculturalism must stress ideas such as dialogue, interaction, and coexistence. In addition, future scholarship on multiculturalism should also consider how to emphasize the differences between individual representatives of the culture, namely the particular instead of general and universal.

Resources

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