

# The 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Bi-, Cross-, Inter-, Mono-, Multi-, Pluri-, Poly-, or Trans-Cultural Education?

**Beniamin Liviu Roş**

Aurel Vlaicu University, Arad, Romania  
rosliviu83@yahoo.com

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**ABSTRACT:** The deployment of globalization, information explosion, and mass culture have brought about terms such as *bicultural education*, *cross-cultural education*, *intercultural education*, *monocultural education*, *multicultural education*, *pluricultural education*, *polycultural education*, and *transcultural education* in both English language dictionaries and literature on education. These terms are frequently and/or interchangeably used, leading to confusion. This article investigates and defines these terms, comparing them to see if their interchangeable usage is justified or not. The importance of this issue resides in the fact that educators need to know which type of cultural education best prepares for “life, work, and citizenship.” Three conclusions are drawn: the authors cited in references have failed to provide a clear semantic definition or a distinct epistemological foundation for these concepts; there are two main types of *cultural education* – *passive* and *active*; and using only the terms *multicultural education* and *intercultural education* could be a suitable solution to the issue.

**KEYWORDS:** 21<sup>st</sup> century education, bicultural, cross-cultural, intercultural, monocultural, multicultural, pluricultural, polycultural, transcultural

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## Introduction

Back in 1916, American educational reformer John Dewey argued that “cultural education is tantamount to social efficiency” (Mintz 2017, 12) and that “social efficiency and personal culture are synonyms instead of antagonists”

(Dewey 1916, 130, in Mintz 2017, 12). The purpose of education in the 21st century is to “prepare young people for life, work *and* citizenship” (Camins 2015), a “multiple-purpose perspective [that] has practical implications for both day-to-day instruction as well as education policy” and that implies a “significant cultural change” (Camins 2015). According to Chan (2016, 1, 7), the purpose of higher education is double – *public (advanced knowledge and higher cognitive skills, decreased reliance on governmental financial support, **greater appreciation for diversity**, greater productivity and higher tax payments, greater social cohesion, increased charitable giving, increased community service, increased quality of civic life, less likeliness to smoke, more likeliness to donate blood, more likeliness to vote, and reduced crime rates)* and *private (advanced knowledge, better consumer decision-making, greater rates of employment, higher salaries and work benefits, improved ability to adapt to new technologies, improved health and life expectancy, improved working conditions, increased personal status, less likeliness to experience poverty, more likeliness to attend graduate school, more likeliness to raise children with higher IQ, and personal and professional mobility)*. Kiziltepe (2010 in Chan 2016, 9) distinguished between *economic/social benefits* and *non-economic benefits* (a sense of purpose, *interpersonal competence, **multicultural understanding**, skills in problem identification and problem solving, and the confidence to act in ways that make a difference*).

Education types (Rotaru 2021b, 190-196) are determined by a multiplicity of factors among which **culture**, gender, geographic location, race, regional ideologies, religion, social influences, and wealth (Macur 2020, 983). The question arising in a world defined by the deployment of globalization (Rotaru 2014, 532-541), information explosion, and mass culture is which type of cultural education (Rotaru 2021a, 87-92) best prepares for “life, work, and citizenship”? *Bi-, cross-, inter-, mono-, multi-, pluri-, poly-, or trans-cultural education?* Rață (2013, 3) pointed out that some of these concepts have been used frequently and/or interchangeably all over the world. Therefore, to answer the question in the title of this paper, one needs to first define the concepts and then compare them to see if they fully overlap or not. To paraphrase Eliot (2013, 3), “the naming of these concepts is a difficult matter” because both language dictionaries and literature use them in an improper and/or unclear manner, which becomes “a source of reinforcement of prejudice and stereotypes in education.”

## Results and discussions

### 1.1. Bicultural education

**Bicultural** (first used in 1940) means “having or combining the cultural attitudes and customs of two nations, peoples, or ethnic groups” (*Oxford Languages*).

From a *strategic perspective*, **bicultural education** is “a strategy for providing instruction in two cultures” and “an approach to formal instruction [...] adapted from the methods and techniques of bilingual education”; from an *outcome perspective*, bicultural education enhances “a student’s ability to function in both the native culture and the mainstream culture (or mainstream and a second culture for the mainstream child)” and leads “to full participation for nonmainstream and mainstream youth alike in the socioeconomic opportunities that [a] nation offers”; from a *target population perspective*, bicultural education is “a reciprocal process [...] aimed, at least ideally, at all students [who] benefit from competencies in two cultures.” (*Oxford Languages*)

The *purpose* of **bicultural education** is, according to Gibson (1984, 95), “to produce learners who have competencies in and can operate successfully in two different cultures” and according to Jenkin (2016, 18), who focused on teacher education delivery of **bicultural education**, it consists in “developing student teachers’ cultural understanding and commitment.” **Bicultural education** is a partial synonym of *multicultural education*.

### 1.2. Cross-cultural education

**Cross-cultural** (first used in 1942) means “relating to different cultures or comparison between them” (*Oxford Languages*). The term “deals with the comparison of different cultures. In cross-cultural communication, differences are understood and acknowledged, and can bring about individual change, but not collective transformations. In cross-cultural societies, one culture is often considered “the norm” and all other cultures are compared or contrasted to the dominant culture.” (Schiefer 2016)

Fries (2002) distinguishes between **cross-cultural** “something which covers more than one culture [in a non-interactive way]” (e.g., a cross-cultural study of education in Western Europe, which compares aspects of education in various countries separately, without any interaction between the various educational systems) and **intercultural** “something which covers

more than one culture [in an interactional way]" (e.g., a cross-cultural study of the experiences of students/teachers who move from one educational system to another).

For Smith (1956, in Métraux 1956, 578), **cross-cultural education** is "the reciprocal process of learning and adjustment that occurs when individuals sojourn for educational purposes in a society that is culturally foreign to them, normally returning to their own society after a limited period. At the societal level, it is a process of cultural diffusion and change, involving temporary 'exchange of persons' for training and experience;" for Métraux (1956, 583), it is "a social institution [...] highly responsive to changing climates of opinion" of a "very complex nature."

**Cross-cultural education** is a synonym for *educational travel* (Bodger, Bodger & Frost 2010, in Rață 2013, 6) and for *transcultural education*.

**Cross-cultural education**, *intercultural education*, *multicultural education*, and *polycultural education* are used interchangeably (Chaika 2022, 3615).

### 1.3. Intercultural education

**Intercultural** (first used in the middle of the 1930s) means "taking place between cultures, or derived from different cultures" (*Oxford Languages*). The term "describes communities in which there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures. Intercultural communication focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of deep relationships. In an intercultural society, no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from one another and grows together." (Schriefer 2016).

The Council of Europe has defined **intercultural education** in terms of "reciprocity" (Rey 2006, in Portera 2008, 483).

Portera (2008, 481) distinguished it from *multicultural education* and *transcultural education*; he also pointed out (Portera 2008, 487) the *benefits of intercultural education* – innovative educational strategies, interesting projects, noticeable and significant changes in textbooks, programmes, curricula and in school legislation, and revolutionary ideas. Portera (2008, 488) concluded that it represents "the most appropriate response to the challenges of globalisation and complexity", that it helps "to identify the risks of globalisation and multicultural communities; of economically motivated rules and regulations, without any intervention by governments and/or

politics”, that it can “identify new opportunities (e.g. fruitful exchanges between different people; new interactive/paritetic forms of communication and relationship)”, that “it takes into consideration both the common objectives of all human beings and specific peculiarities, it transcends the mere acknowledgment of equal dignity of all people of the world, regardless of skin colour, language and religion (basic principles of transcultural education), respect for differences (right to have the same opportunities though being different), or peaceful coexistence (basic principles of multicultural education, which is a desirable goal when we consider wars and injustices in many parts of the world)”, that it “offers the opportunity to ‘show’ real cultural differences, to compare and exchange them, in a word, to interact: action in the activity; a compulsory principle in every educational relationship”, that it “provides the immigrant with skills and abilities to manage activities with common norms and regulations”, that it involves “a game, an ‘interaction’ between people with different ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds in which the aim is not assimilation or fusion, but encounter, communication, dialogue, contact, in which roles and limits are clear, but the end is open.”

**Intercultural education** is identified with **bicultural education** in many areas of the world (e.g., Peru) (Gashe 1998, in Akkari 1998, 106).

**Cross-cultural education, intercultural education, multicultural education, and polycultural education** are used interchangeably (Chaika 2022, 3615).

#### 1.4. *Monocultural education*

**Monocultural** refers to “a single, homogeneous culture without diversity or dissension” (*The Free Dictionary*).

**Monocultural education** refers to education in which students come to school with diverse linguistic backgrounds and experiences that are not part of the official school knowledge, attain literacy in languages that are not their home languages, and have their cultural linguistic diversity mentioned in the curriculum and other policy documents, but teacher preparation does not seem to address issues of multiculturalism (Molosiwa 2009, 2).

#### 1.5. *Multicultural education*

**Multicultural** (first used in 1941) means “relating to or containing several cultural or ethnic groups within a society” (*Oxford Languages*) It “refers to a society that contains several cultural or ethnic groups [where] people live

alongside one another, but each cultural group does not necessarily have engaging interactions with each other.” (Schriefer 2016)

For Gibson (1984, 111), **multicultural education** is “a normal human experience”; for Gay (1994, 3), “learning about, preparing for, and celebrating cultural diversity, or learning to be bicultural”; for Meier (2007, 2), “a vehicle for people who have different value systems, customs, and communication styles to discover ways to respectfully and effectively share resources, talents and ideas”; for Portera (2008, 485), a synonym for multiculturalism: “Educational intervention, defined as multiculturalism, multicultural education or multicultural pedagogy, works from the de facto situation of the presence of two or more cultures, and aims at the recognition of commonalities and differences”; for Banks (2010, 3 and 20), “at least three things: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process” and “a broad concept with several different and important dimensions [...]: (1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) an equity pedagogy, and (5) an empowering school culture and social structure”; for Gorski (2010), “a progressive approach for transforming education that holistically critiques and responds to discriminatory policies and practices in education.” According to Bulankina and Polyankina (2011, 284), “the meaning of the Russian term **multicultural education** (as it was in the beginning of its conceptualization in the USA) corresponds to its prevalent interpretation as an education in the context of ethnic diversity with the domination of culture of the titular ethnic group – Russian.”

The *purpose* of **multicultural education** is, according to Gibson (1984, 95), multiple: “to equalize educational opportunities for culturally different students,” “to teach students to value cultural differences, to understand the meaning of the culture concept, and to accept others’ right to be different,” “to preserve and to extend cultural pluralism in American society,” and “to produce learners who have competencies in and can operate successfully in two different cultures.”

**Multicultural education** is a synonym for *polycultural education* (Absatova *et al. op.cit*, 1361) and a partial synonym for *bicultural education*.

*Cross-cultural education*, *intercultural education*, **multicultural education**, and *polycultural education* are used interchangeably (Chaika 2022, 3615).

### 1.6. Pluricultural education

**Pluricultural** means “of or pertaining to several cultures” (*Definitions*). For Portera (2008, 485), **pluricultural education** is a synonym for **multicultural education**.

### 1.7. Polycultural education

**Polycultural** (first used in 1941) means “relating to many interacting cultures” (*Wiktionary*). **Polycultural education** is “a process of studying by the younger generation of ethnic, national and world culture aiming the spiritual enrichment, the development of globalization and global consciousness, the formation of readiness and ability to live in a multicultural polyethnic medium presented by the system of cultural values, differing from the own ones” (Absatova *et al.* 2013, 1360).

According to Bulankina and Polyankina (2011, 284), the meaning of **polycultural education** “is close to the contemporary Western concept of multicultural education taking into account gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, exceptionality, language, religion, geography, and age as well as race, nation and ethnicity,” while its main goals are “To create conditions for effective personal self-determination in culture, becoming apparent in actualization of students’ national self-consciousness, social identity and choice of occupation. [...] To enrich students’ individual thesauruses with concepts that describe contemporary sociocultural situation, and familiarize students with speech strategies to discuss cultural phenomena [...]. To cultivate a positive attitude and respect towards all ‘alien’ values of other cultures. [...] To form the skills of intercultural communication, show students the ways to behave in polycultural society, and to provide an opportunity to gain experience of intercultural interaction.” **Polycultural education** is often presented as an umbrella term in post-Soviet countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, etc.) (Chaika 2022, 3615).

**Polycultural education** contributes “to the constructive, creative mediation of differences and lead to the personal and intellectual growth of participants in inter-ethnic dialogue” (Fahrutdinova 2016, 1187).

**Polycultural education** is a synonym for **multicultural education** (Absatova *et al. op.cit.*, 1361). **Cross-cultural education**, **intercultural education**, **multicultural education**, and **polycultural education** are used interchangeably (Chaika 2022, 3615).



### 1.8. Transcultural education

**Transcultural** (first used in 1951) means “relating to or involving more than one culture; cross-cultural” (*Oxford Languages*).

For Portera (2008, 484), the concept of **transcultural education** “refers to something that pervades culture (as in the fields of cross-cultural psychology or transcultural psychiatry).”

**Transcultural** is a synonym for **cross-cultural**.

### Conclusions

The authors cited above have failed to provide a clear semantic definition or a distinct epistemological foundation for these concepts given that the eight types of **cultural education** investigated have been defined as a *concept* (**multicultural education**), a *human experience* (**multicultural education**), a *process* (**bicultural education, cross-cultural education, multicultural education, polycultural education**), a *social institution* (**cross-cultural education**), a *strategy* (**bicultural education**), a *type of education* (**monocultural education, multicultural education**), a *vehicle* (**multicultural education**), an *approach* (**bicultural education, multicultural education**), an *educational reform movement* (**multicultural education**), an *idea* (**multicultural education**), *multiculturalism* (**multicultural education, pluricultural education, polycultural education**), and *reciprocity* (**intercultural education**), while there is no definition proper for **transcultural education**.

Since, according to UNESCO (2006, 18), “There have traditionally been two approaches: Multicultural Education and Intercultural Education. Multicultural education uses learning about other cultures [...] to produce acceptance, or at least tolerance, of these cultures. Intercultural Education aims to go beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of understanding of, respect for and dialogue between the different cultural groups,” the **types of cultural education** investigated above should be grouped into **passive** (**bicultural education, cross-cultural education, monocultural education, multicultural education, pluricultural education, polycultural education, transcultural education**) (Figure 1) and **active** (**intercultural education**) (Figure 2) types.





Figure 1. Graphical representation of multiculturalism

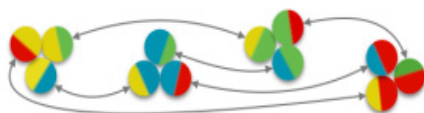


Figure 2. Graphical representation of interculturalism

In literature, however, despite the obvious difference between the two groups, **bicultural education**, **cross-cultural education**, **intercultural education**, **monocultural education**, **multicultural education**, **pluricultural education**, **polycultural education**, and **transcultural education** are used interchangeably thus creating confusion. Therefore, using only the terms **multicultural education** and **intercultural education** could be a suitable solution.

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