

In a new study by the International Alliance of Leading Education Institutes (IALEI) a group of leading international researchers conclude that education systems around the world must put **multicultural diversity** at the forefront of their concerns.

The death of **MULTICULTURALISM** *is an exaggeration*

By CAMILLA MEHLSSEN

* “The report of my death was an exaggeration.” So wrote Mark Twain in 1897 when he learned that a journalist was sent to report whether he was dead or not. The rumours had spread because his cousin was seriously ill.

Some may think of the author’s famous quote as the immigration debate heats up in many countries. In late autumn 2010, Chancellor Angela Merkel declared the death of multiculturalism in Germany.

“Attempts to build a multicultural society in Germany have ‘utterly failed,’” the German leader said. She also said that diversity has failed and that it was an illusion to think that Germans and foreign workers could “live happily side by side”.

There is no doubt that the pendulum swings away from multiculturalism in Europe. But will it lead to the death of multiculturalism? If we look into the near future, the opposite may very well be the answer: There will be a growth of multiculturalism. Why? Because diversity is a necessity in a global world.

As Associate Professor Rahil Ismail from the National Institute of Education in Singapore puts it when she describes Singapore’s positive attitude to multiculturalism:

“It took a lot of time, effort and vision, and it took a lot of negotiation between the different groups. Fundamentally, over the years, all of us understood that peaceful co-existence benefits everybody (...) Our survival depends on our ability to live together.”

Re-engage with multiculturalism

In this perspective it seems a paradox that many societies have assigned a lower priority to multiculturalism. In a new study by the International Alliance of Leading Education Institutes (IALEI) a group of leading international researchers conclude that education systems around the world must put multicultural diversity at the forefront of their concerns.

“Today’s unprecedented global mobility requires the world’s educators to make multicultural diversity a priority in the education landscape,” Hi-Won Yoon says, Professor from Seoul National University and

* IALEI study 2010

Each year, the International Alliance of Leading Education Institutes (IALEI) highlights a research theme. In 2010, the theme is multicultural education and IALEI has assembled a team of researchers from the ten IALEI member countries to explore multicultural education in selected countries.

The study provides a state-of-the-art picture of how things stand with multicultural education in selected countries around the world. The country reports were presented on the annual IALEI conference, which

was held in October 2010 at the National Institute of Education in Singapore.

In the spring 2011, IALEI will publish the final comparative study on multicultural education as well as policy recommendations.

In this issue of the Education Alliance Magazine you will meet some of the IALEI researchers, learn about some of the conclusions and find cases of best practice in multicultural education around the globe.

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chair of the ten country IALEI research team (2010).

Population movements involve both privileged transnational elites and displaced refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants. Cultural diversity is accelerated by the proliferation of information communication technologies which facilitate global interaction across cultures, languages and identities. The overall aim of these developments is to spread multiculturalism to all parts of the world, beyond the societies with a long-standing history of racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious pluralism.

The IALEI study indicates that this reality is marked by deep inequalities and entrenched privileges, posing dramatic challenges to countries across the world. As a result, all children need to develop intercultural capabilities of negotiating across differences of identity, social justice, multilingual skills and anti-racist dispositions.

Teaching for diverse classrooms

So far multicultural education has been linked to minorities, but in some countries the current majority will become a minority in the near future. Professor Amy Stambach is an expert in global studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and part of the IALEI research team. She says that by 2050, more than half of all students will identify as non-white in the US.

“Today more than 20 percent of all students speak a language other than English at home. This is twice as many as a generation ago. This indicates the diversity and ways in which the population is changing rapidly in the US.

It has profound implications for the ways in which we train and think about training our teachers because the demographics of the teachers whom we train do not reflect these changes as quickly. This is a challenge for schools and education and even for communities,” Amy Stambach says.

Teacher education is key when it comes to educating future citizens to live in a multicultural society. According to Hiwon Yoon, the role of the teachers is the most important in providing equal opportunities for multicultural students, seeking to change the school system and for improving multicultural education.

“As most scholars agree, teachers are the most important factor for good schooling because students spend most of their time with teachers in and out of classrooms,” she says.

* Recommendations

The International Alliance of Leading Education Institutes (IALEI) recommends that all countries:

1 Recognize their responsibility for developing appropriate educational responses to the ethnic and cultural complexity within their borders. *The ten country reports show that the response to cultural diversity in different parts of the world is uneven or non-existent.*

2 Support constructive research examining critical

issues regarding diversity and equity in education. *The ten country reports show that evidence-based policy and educational interventions are necessary to assist minority populations in achieving their potential.*

3 Ensure that 21st century teacher education is reformed in light of the cultural and social heterogeneity of local, national and global communities. *The ten country reports show that teacher education is vital for preparing future global citizens.*

A waste of human capital

The results of ten national studies conclude that there is a serious lack of social cohesion if countries neglect to provide educational equality for all.

The researchers call on education systems around the world to embrace multicultural education within the specific contexts of their national setting. Teacher education, pedagogy and curriculum development, education administration and policy as well as research must address the growth of multiculturalism across the globe.

“The overriding goal should be to foster a pervasive commitment to equal and enriched educational opportunities for all. Without this, we face a gross waste of human capital and skill in all societies due to the continuing failure to achieve equal educational outcomes for all,” Hi-Won Yoon says. ■