Soutphommasane’s 'cultural literate dialogue' and its application and lessons for multiculturalism and multicultural education

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The justification for reassessing multiculturalism and multicultural education comes from the reality of the idea being discussed internationally and the continuation of empirical data being collected within multicultural education research. Kymlicka provides the multicultural theory which advocates human rights and multicultural citizenship. Parekh and Banks support multicultural education from English and American contexts (Race, 2015). Australia is the focal county in this paper for several reasons, firstly, because Australia has produced its own recent national Multicultural Policy (DSS, 2011); secondly, Tim Soutphommasane (2009: 2012: 2013) when developing Kymlicka’s focus, has attempted to promote Australian multiculturalism and citizenship through a ‘culturally literate dialogue’ which focuses partly on Australian patriotism; thirdly, Australian policy and theory will be applied to the Rethinking Multiculturalism / Reassessing Multicultural Education (RMRME) project in New South Wales (Kelly et al, 2011; Watkins et al, 2013) which develops ideas based on the work of Banks and Parekh and gives a federal application to the ideas of Soutphommasane with wider state and international implications for multicultural education policy and practice.

The original application of both Soutphommasane’s work and the empirical data collected by the RMRME project on multiculturalism and multicultural education highlights that Australia is internationally one of the foremost countries in the world developing multicultural perspectives and policy. Interestingly Australia has its national values formalised in policy, whereas Britain does not, even though there are political, sociological and cultural debates which fall short in Britain of actually defining in policy a list of British values. To position Australian politics, theory and education research are examined. This paper begins with an examination of the importance of three key authors: Kymlicka (2012); Parekh (2011); and; Banks (2014), as advocates of multiculturalism and multicultural education. Gillard’s (2012) multiculturalism statement as a former Australian Prime Minister, coming after political speeches touching upon aspects of multiculturalism in Europe (Race in Race and Lander, 2014) will also be analysed alongside Soutphommasane’s (2009; 2012) ‘cultural literate dialogue’ idea. This evidence puts into context the list of Australian values through citizenship (DOIC, 2012) and the consequent and continuing Australian policy response at federal and national levels. This is underlined in the Australian Census statistics of 2011. Not only is the population of Australia growing, but the culture is becoming even more diverse. Therefore the conclusions of this paper will reassess both Australian multiculturalism and multicultural education and examine lessons for the wider international community.