

Multiculturalism

Tends to assume that ethnic, faith and other differences are ascribed and static – and protected as a ‘birthright’. Also tends to regard identity groups as homogeneous.

Minority differences defended in face of what are seen as assimilationist tendencies. But protection of majority identity (often national identity) has been opposed as exclusionary.

Personal identity is presented as self-defined and consolidated through reinforcement with people of the same background; emphasis on knowing self first through heritage and roots.

Difference is seen in ‘groupist’ terms with the idea of ‘pure’ identities tacitly supported through acceptance of categories like ‘Black’, ‘White’ ‘Jewish’, Sikh and ‘Irish’ and these are treated as homogenous groups in legal and policy terms (eg funding and representation). Cosmopolitan identities regarded with suspicion, or opposed.

‘Difference’ revolves around long-standing majority/minority divisions within each nation and with a focus on ‘accommodations’ between them.

‘Difference’ is defined in binary terms, usually in relation to ‘race’ or ethnicity, (and with faith as an ethnic group).

Many proponents of multiculturalism believe that difference is determined by socio-economic factors (and that they can only be made less salient through equality programmes) reflecting historical patterns of expression and exploitation.

Multiculturalism has been passive, fearing that promotion of any sense of commonality or belonging would tend towards assimilation and loss of group identities.

Multicultural policies have restricted debate about diversity to deny the ‘oxygen of publicity’ to extremists fearing the raising of tensions. Denying free speech has led to accusations of ‘political correctness’.

Interculturalism

Based on a dynamic concept of difference that welcomes evolution over time, with group identity to be challenged. Regards each group as fluid, with group identity seen as heterogeneous.

Interculturalists see both minority and majority identities as constantly being re-made, partly because of their inter-relation, but also due to external and global influences.

Personal identity is understood only in relation to others. Self is discovered by exploration and openness not by building a protective shell to withstand exchange.

Interculturalism recognises plural identities, with increasing numbers of mixed race and intermarriage, alongside growing numbers of dual and multi-national identities, and interventions that cross categories. Heterogeneous hybrid and cosmopolitan identities regarded as the new ‘normal’.

‘Difference’ goes beyond national references, influenced by international events and exchange, eg through diaspora and other social media communications.

‘Difference’ is multifaceted, embracing gender, disability, sexual orientation and age, as well as nationality and faith.

Interculturalists recognise socio-economic factors as important determinants of prejudices and stereotypes, but not as the sole determinants. They also emphasise education and interaction programmes as a means of disconfirming stereotypes and pre-conceptions.

Interculturalism is pro-active: developing common values and belonging at societal level; collective identity is multifaceted.

Interculturalism encourages more open debate and ‘dangerous conversations’ to enable people to come to terms with change; supports looser legal framework. And is less fearful of championing the creativity and innovation from diversity.