Cultural competence, inclusion and marginalised groups

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The concept of 'cultural competence' goes to the heart of the values, norms and traditions of both organisations and wider society, recognising that these are formed in the histories and intersections of power, structure and community. In education, it is concerned with understanding the barriers to the existence of an inclusive community and how the diversity of cultures, experiences and values are often submerged under the weight of dominant socio-cultural hegemonic forms. Yet, the idea of cultural competence may also be understood pedagogically as a transformative process through which human behaviour is changed and enriched through a genuinely participatory social and cultural interaction. In this paper we consider how a cultural competence perspective can be used to deconstruct the structures and practices by which the experiences and identities of certain groups are marginalised in education settings. We will also discuss strategies for achieving cultural competence in classrooms, institutions and education systems. Finally, we will argue that pedagogies of cultural competence are critical to the healthy formation of democratic structures in increasingly heterogeneous societies and in the interactions of global citizenship.