

MULTICULTURALITY AND EDUCATION

Multikulturalita a vzdelávanie

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Abstract

Education in diversity, based on the Universal Declarations of the Human Rights, gains a bigger importance because the context of globalization stresses homogeneous trends and also individual reactions in the face of this phenomenon. The richness of the diversity and the possibility of communication among the human beings are, without doubt, essential contents in educative curriculum. They are not isolated actions directed to concrete social groups: it is a global project to understand and assume the difference among people as a part of the identities and as a positive value in all societies.

Key words

Children education, multiculturalism, inclusive education, globalization, identities

JEL Classification: I 24, I 25.

1. Introduction

We find the fundamentals of education in diversity in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and especially in the rights of the minorities (Alegre, 2004, P. 98). However, intercultural education goes one step further: from the base of respect and tolerance we want to arrive to the positive valuation of the diversity as a richness we must understand and assume. They are not isolated actions directed to concrete social groups in unfavorable situations: we are talking about a global project for all the students. In short, we want to build a culture of the diversity, and this has repercussions on school curricula and also on teachers training:

We consider that it is necessary to educate generations without fear of differences among people. We want to educate people who want to meet and understand other people and other situations. It only will be able if teachers develop the capacity to deal with learners' diversity. We don't have to consider this as an extra effort or an exceptional procedure for determined students or moments. On the contrary, this capacity means that diversity and heterogeneity are normal (Alegre, 2010, P. 34).

Beyond all doubt, we are in the face of one of the main challenges in XXI c. education, this affects, not only the relationship among the original population of a determined place, but also the way people build their own identity and, above all, the necessity to overcome traditional ways of thinking and acting according to the concept of citizenship.

2. Diversity and intercultural education

From a cultural point of view, in the process of globalization we find two trends that can be opposed: on the one hand, there is the homogeneous trend that provokes the lost of the cultural identity and many ways of resistance; on the other hand, there is a tendency to transfer and to the interpretation of cultures that originate enriching crosses and new cultural synthesis. In this sense, as we will see in the following sections, all the cultures are mixed but this quality is an irreversible process and it is also more important than it was in the past: in an anthropological sense, there are not pure cultures, and culture is always interculturality (Bartolomé, 2008 a, P. 10). So we must take advantage of this cultural and humanizing richness.

Another aspect of this new educative focus is the need to see education in the diversity from a new concept of citizenship, based on equality, democracy, pluralism, participation and dialogue. From these ideas, we want to educate citizens who understand the diversity, the multiple membership and the singularity as individual and collective richness; as we said before, we also have to practice tolerance in order to get respect and positive acceptance of the difference as an enriching element; finally, we must accept the own right to the singularity and the right of others, we must get the right to the difference and the right to the universality as complementary items.

According to Margarita Bartolomé (2008a, P. 16-17) the radical changes suffered by society about globalization, exchange and immigration, affect

identity process, because we can opt to defend essentialist ideas about cultural identity or to consider identities as realities made from historic and social materials that let the creation of various belongings along life. The building of these identities is one of the main goals teachers must include to get an authentic intercultural education.

As for intercultural education definitions, many authors agree on some characteristics that Auxiliadora Sales summarizes as follow:

We start from the idea that Intercultural Education is an educative model that enriches citizenship culture because of the respect to the diversity, by means of exchange and dialogue, for the development of a democratic society based on equality, justice and solidarity (Sales, 2005, P. 9).

Teresa Aguado points out that intercultural pedagogy comes from a sociopolitical context that evolves from assimilation positions in the treatment of cultural differences to other positions in which these differences are treated with democratic values and social participation. This author says that the concept of intercultural education, in the European context, refers to a reformer trend in the educative practice with wide and various goals, and wants to answer to the diversity caused by the different social groups that live together in society. Intercultural education means interaction, exchange, no isolationism, reciprocity and solidarity among cultures and it also means the knowledge and acceptance of other values and ways of living (Aguado, 2003, P. 33)

Olga María Alegre (2010, P. 46) thinks that an inclusive education must value students' rules and culture. Inclusive education also means a common learning whatever personal, social and cultural conditions learners have, including people with disabilities. These measures are for all students not only for minorities because interculturality deals with the whole society:

The intercultural hypothesis, in order to be coherent and concrete, must be global and generic. This hypothesis is headed for everybody, not only for a part of students, to avoid contradictions and segregations (Alegre, 2003, P. 33)

According to Margarita Bartolomé, the need of this education for all the students is not yet generalized among teachers who often confuse compensatory measures (above all the linguistic) for intercultural education with immigrant students:

Teachers thought that immigrant students' goal was to get a good skill in language at school. All the other cultural differences and, especially, the idea that intercultural education affects all the students and not only "different" students were on a second level or

were not in teachers conscience (Bartolomé, 2008a, P. 14)

So, according to cultural diversity, we have to incorporate ethnic, linguistic, social and cultural elements of the social minorities in teaching because they will be important for people to feel valued. Interculturality [1] is defined by Xavier Mínguez like this:

Interculturality is an exchange where not only exists a way to culturalize a weak group but an enrichment that rises from the communication and the knowledge of the others (Mínguez, 2010, P. 563).

We must make an effort to bridge gap between the theoretical approaches about interculturality and the daily work at schools; first of all, integration and adaptation; then we have to favor social cohesion and respect cultural differences among people. These ideas must be included in pedagogical activities to transform the traditional educative line. We have to know how pluralism affects education in our society (Bartolomé, 2008a, P. 15). According to this author:

Intercultural education is a bet for understand education in multicultural contexts. This means the dialogue among cultures, from their own recognition and valuation, which produces an operative solidarity.

The valuation of the cultural diversity in our society, the acceptance of intercultural education is for all, the promotion of interethnic and intercultural relationships, from an effective and communicative competence, the desire of integration of people who come from other countries into new societies with a good integration at school and the importance of the values in construction of a new social concept are, among others, some of the characteristics that intercultural education includes (Bartolomé, 2008a, P. 18-19).

Banks at 90's had proposed a wide model of multicultural education that include the interculturality and that rises the institutional dimension to put institutional changes at schools, in the curriculum, in educative resources, in teaching styles, in attitudes, in languages at schools, in the orientation program, the educative assessment, the school culture and the hidden curriculum (Banks, 1997, P. 25). It is obvious that all these institutional changes, in order to put intercultural education in, will be only possible if there is a political spirit of building a real intercultural society, if there is a political and social project (Bartolomé, 2008a, P.19).

In Spain intercultural educative models were introduced in autonomous regions in the early years of XXI century, unlike other countries in which this models based on cultural pluralism already were established, because they were countries with a large

population who came from other European zones or other continents.

As for the challenge to turn the education into a social factor, Bartolomé uses Bank's proposal that talks about five dimensions to consider multicultural education a dynamic system, from the perspective of pedagogical equality:

1. *Integration of content*: the analysis of the use teachers do about examples or contents that come from different cultures in the respective disciplines.
2. *Knowledge construction*: the knowledge construction process has a lot of cultural influences that affect teachers and students. Teachers have to study the possible influences of social and ethnical positions in the teaching and learning process; students have to discover that knowledge is a social construction in which the own cultural opinions are present.
3. *Resolution of prejudices*: addressing potential stereotypes, prejudices and discriminations that exist among students and their lives at school and changing racist attitudes for other more democratic and positive. In this sense, it is interesting to distinguish between non-racial model that prevents prejudices and develops cooperation, and the anti-racist model that diagnoses racist attitudes at school to combat and delete them.
4. *Development of a psychology of equality*: this means that teachers should guide their efforts to get a higher quality in the learning of all the students, regardless of racial origin, culture, gender, sexual option, social class... The ultimate goal is to reach real equality of opportunities for all the students.
5. *A school culture that promotes the empowerment*: This dimension highlights the organizational and structural changes of the school.. These changes should allow people at risk of exclusion or already excluded autonomy, development, personal power and confidence in their own possibilities and resources for an active participation in society. This dimension means to recognize that a social change in depth cannot be possible without a radical change in the way we become people, so we have to share power, participation and resources to overcome injustice and social inequality.

The two last dimensions present two questions which are at the basis of intercultural education. According to Margarita Bartolomé:

These latest dimensions bring us back to an issue that is emerging as one of the more important to make progress in the development of people.

How to educate in plural societies to be able to build an effective democracy, a fair, moral and civic community where no one is excluded and where it is possible to find common values that are the basis of the social and political project? How to do it respecting the personal and cultural peculiarities, not from a non-existent uniformitarianism or dominant culture but from the respect for diversity, trying to overcome the real barriers, inequalities and conflicts? (Bartolomé, 2008a, P. 22-23)

Some aspects of these basic issues and that are among the pillars of any educational and intercultural project are, on the one hand the study of identities (not just national or ethnic, but also of gender or sexual preference and others) and , on the other hand , intercultural mediation (as a strategy of conflict resolution in the various fields of society). As regards the first aspect, in whatever project intercultural education project, María Ángeles Marín considers two levels in the definition of the term identity:

At a first level of meaning "identify" means singling, in other words, distinguish something as a unit in time and space, discernible from others (...). From this perspective, cultural identity means the own location and that of the other in reference to a culture, the classification of a person as belonging to a group that is supposed to have a specific culture, From this concept of the identity, appear identifying adjective about "the other", either group or a person belonging to it, which are the basis for the formation of prejudice. At a second level of meaning, the identity refers the representation that the subject has. In the individual case, the search for identity is understood as the construction of a representation of itself, that is coherent and harmonious with the images from one's own (Marín, 2008, P. 34).

If we apply this idea to the societies, we find definitions like Luis Villoro's, for whom the collective identity is "an intersubjective representation, shared by a majority of the members of a village, which will be a same group" (Villoro, 1998, P. 65). From this perspective, the identity of the peoples refers to their culture as a system of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that are transmitted to each member of the group; it is a way to feel, to understand and to act in the world and shared forms of life that are expressed in institutions, regulated behaviors, artifacts, art objects, knowledge that is transmitted... In this sense we must remember the importance of the collective memory for the retrospective of a group identification, above all nations (this collective memory is passed down

through the family, school, media...). As explained Marín from other authors as Grosser, the content of the collective memory is linked to temporal variations, so any identity is quite changeable over time, especially if it is a collective identity or if it is defined in terms of categories or groups (Marín, 2008, P. 34).

Following Villoro, María Ángeles Marín believes that the representation which a community has of itself can appear in two different ways: *the singularity* or that of *the project*. From this perspective the identity of a group by way of the singularity means to search own notes that separate it from the other peoples or nations. It would be an approach in the ideologies which advocate aggressive or defensive nationalism, in the imperialism and the fundamentalism movements of religious roots. The search for identity from the singularity has the following characteristics:

- Identity is achieved by abstraction, by exclusion of the common notes and singularities election.
- If the identity of a people can be achieved by selecting peculiar grades, that set of notes tends to be seen as a collective value, transmitted by the education and cultural tradition.
- The features that make to recognize the identity of a people, stay through the changes, The identity is maintained under the voice of the past. That voice orders fidelity to the own history. The collective value becomes a destination (Marín, 2008, P. 36).

From this point of view, the function of the collective identity is essentially to preserve the past heritage.

However, we have another way to build the representation of collective identity: interrelationship and reference to others. From this perspective, the identity is not built only by opposition but by the dialectic with others. There is no identity without *another*, and, on the one hand, collective identity is defined by social and cultural categories that are in continuous mutation, so there is the possibility of building the representation of identity openly, as a project. This way of building identity representation is based on identification, that does not mean imitation and consists of integrating into the own culture elements that come from outside and that answer new necessities and satisfy new desires.

Thus, both in people and communities, the identity is not built exclusively by differentiation but by a complex process of identification and separation. The specificity of a culture is not in the singular and unique notes, but in the way to express them and to integrate forms and cultural characteristics that other culture integrates differently; from this point of view, the collective identity of a nation is under continuous construction and is subject to change, depending on the circumstances (Marín, 2008, P. 36-37).

In relation to national identities, Marín reflects the opinion of most authors who link the birth of nation and nationalism with modernity, and associate national identity with the concept of people and culture:

Nation is defined as a group of people who share a set of cultural symbols (language, religion, traditions, customs), with a common origin and a historical trajectory, seated in the same territory (Marín, 2008, P. 37).

For ethical and symbolist authors, national identities are rebuilt continually through processes of selection within the heritage of ethnic and symbolist elements, and the *reidentification* with the rebuilt ethnic heritage: for these specialists, the processes of reconstruction, reinterpretation and reidentification of the ethno symbolic components are essential to the permanence and flexibility of many national identities in modern times. In terms of models of nation-building María Ángeles Marín defines two: the civic nation model and the model of the ethnic nation (Marín, 2008, P. 37). We speak of civic nationalism when the nation arises as a political community that occupies a territory, whose members are subject to the laws of the community: any person, regardless of their place of origin or their ethnic background can become on in full membership of the nation if it satisfies the conditions of citizenship. For its part, the ethnic nation model is characterized by the grouping of a set of individuals with a common characteristics inherited from the past, such as blood, culture and language.

In both models, the nation-building requires a process of cultural construction and national identity: in this sense we must remember that nations do not exist in the world regardless of the beliefs of the people, because they are precisely defined by this belief. However, we can consider the identity as a social construction, therefore subject to the social changes (Marín, 2008, P. 38). According to authors such as Miller (2000), María Ángeles Marín defends the need to build a new concept of national identity which exceeds the civic and ethnic models of nation-building, which would be promoted in a common public culture accessible to all citizens: the objective is the construction of a concept of national identity in which nations are conceived as groups of people with a common identity consisting of a history and a shared public culture, but where the cultural membership is inclusive and not exclusive. This implies that common public culture must be able to coexist with various particular subcultures.

It is obvious that the feeling of belonging is essential to generate an active citizenship, and necessary to carry out progress in the construction of global citizenship, studying the feeling of

identification with the community, and we must also bear in mind that every person needs to belong to a social and cultural community that will provide a cultural reference; this reference is required to grant an order and to give sense to the reality that surrounds it. Cultural and national membership provides a sense of identity and in this sense is a source of trust; so, if we bring to the end the defense of tradition, identity and difference, we will find impossible to resolve conflicts. Therefore, we must maintain a balance between tradition and change, between what is particular and what is universal. In short, the essentialism in the definition of national, religious or ethnic identities can be dangerous, as we shall see below.

Ethnic identity is based on a cultural frame of reference from which a community defines its identity as a group, and from this perspective, the identity is the consequence of belonging to a homogeneous group in terms of culture. However although the ethnic groups use cultural indicators to define borders, culture is not restricted within these borders as it is the territory, since intercultural communication occurs in all societies and establishes a wider cultural field. This reality is manifested in modern societies, where also becomes evident that the cultural vitality depends on the exchanges which is able to maintain with other cultures (Marín, 2008, P. 41).

National membership is based on solidarity within a wider group: although the members of a nation don't share moral values or ways of life, they are deeply linked by other links, such as the language and the culture. For the majority of people it is positive and even indispensable to refer to their own community as a space that gives them an important part of their identity; in many cases the national reference is so obvious that it is practically invisible, and the most obvious nationalisms are generally those that are in a situation of irredentism and contrast with dominant state structures. But we have to recognize, as does Marín, that the nation is not an absolute value, since it is one of the references that we use to live, but not the only: in this sense a misleading use of national sentiment would be one that is based on the (erroneous) belief in the incompatibility of identities on the personal level. Each person synthesizes a complex composition about identity based on the family origin, place of residence, professional activities, language skills, religious beliefs, gender and sexual orientation...

An alternative approach to the above defining membership, is that the pluralistic tendency. This cosmopolitan perspective, progress towards a global civilization and it means that everyone must be able to be recognized and identified, and this new civilization must incorporate elements of all cultures. The construction of identity, from this point of view, is

carried out through cultural diversity (Marín, 2008, P. 42)

However, this universalistic approach has to overcome two evident dangers: the hegemony and the universalization. People react when their identity is threatened and when someone wants to impose a cultural colonization (some events in the Arab world in recent decades could exemplify this statement). If modernization equals westernization it is logical that a large part of the planet will experience that as the abandonment of a portion of its real identity. Besides, this type of reaction is not exclusive of nonwestern societies, since in the West there are also defensive reactions of identity when a majority culture tries to impose on another minority one (it would be the case of the cultures and the languages of those territories without their own state in Europe, for example).

Globalization must mean plurality as diversity. The value of this cultural diversity does not arise as differentiation, but as an access to cultures of different groups. Thus, the affirmation of an immutable identity that we acquire at birth is no longer a natural attitude, but that identity becomes an act of choice among a wide range of possibilities (Marín, 2008, P. 43). On the other hand, the access to other cultures allows us to appreciate the uniqueness and also the forces and the limitation of our culture. Finally, any form of life can express by its own the entire range of human potential.

Mobility and immigration, for example, have caused that today many groups of people have the opportunity to choose cultural identities different to those acquired at birth. These new possibilities, unthinkable in the past, made many people to make choices related to cultural membership. In this context, the possibility of combining different affiliations is a characteristic feature of the diversity, and there is no incompatibility between the internal evaluation of the culture by its members and the external value of diversity for society: the value of membership increases from the experimentation of cultures and, conversely, only those cultural practices deemed valuable by the members of the group will contribute to the diversity of a public culture. Therefore, only from the opening to the experiences of other cultural groups of the environment we can enrich our own group.

As Teresa Aguado (2003, P. 37) highlights, from the social changes that have occurred in recent decades, the political social and educational trends in cultural diversity of our neighboring countries, are as follows:

- Ensuring equal opportunities for all, combating social and cultural exclusion and ensuring a democratic future.

- Promoting intercultural education for all the students in order to prepare them for life in coexistence in a democratic and peaceful manner.
- We have to build education systems more flexible so that they are better suited to complex situations in which needs are solved in a global perspective.
- Stimulate cooperation between schools and their surroundings, mainly families, employers and local associations.
- We have to improve and diversify the teaching of languages as a way for European integration and international solidarity.
- We also have to encourage the transfer of experiences between countries and regions in which the phenomenon of cultural diversity, without being new, requires understanding and resolution in a renewed way, and identify, disseminate and generalize the success and equally practices. At this point the collaboration of non-governmental organizations and academic institutions and research in education is essential.
- Slow down the development of racism and xenophobia in their various manifestations.

According to Aguado (2003, P. 38) there is a growing trend in reference to the acceptance of the intercultural option among the educational leaders in multicultural contexts, but which is not reflected in educational practice and in the levels of acceptance by the general public. It is clear that intercultural education goes beyond what the author called liberal-assimilative view, and that requires both a modification of contents and curricular strategies and an adequate level of cultural competency [2] by professionals involved. In general, it is detected a tendency to declaration of principles in education rather than not to the production of models and materials for the practice of multicultural education. So, it is evident that there is a lack of coordination between political declarations and educational practice, and that in many cases persist obsolete programs that do not attend the intercultural dimension; Besides, there is an ambiguous political speech between the intentions and the possibilities, between the proposals and the resources that are

Remarks

[1] In this context we prefer the word *intercultural*, more used in Europe, to *multicultural* that is used in Anglaxon countries. *Multicultural* includes various collectives such as those related to sex gender, sexual option or disabilities, while *intercultural* is related to ethnical and linguistic groups (Alegre, 2010). Finally, as

provided; Finally, there is a marginalization of the treatment of cultural diversity initiatives: it is very important that these initiatives are integrated into the whole of the educational activity, forming part of the regular curriculum, and not as special measures for special groups.

These issues make us doubt about the real willingness to implement intercultural education, In addition, in many cases this state of affairs encourages a perverse use of intercultural education that conceals undeliverable inequalities. According to this author, three fundamental conditions are needed:

- a) Relating the discourse on models and ideologies with the practical consequences. This implies support of research and training projects that enable the collaboration of researchers and educators at different educational levels.
- b) To pay attention to the teachers' training, being aware that they do not change their attitudes unless they discover it is necessary and that this change improves their work.
- c) We need more local, regional and international resources devoted to the promotion of intercultural education (Aguado, 2003, P. 38-39).

3. Conclusions

The great value of cultural diversity –and that we must promote in educational environments – is not the difference, but the fact that it provides opportunities for communication among various ways of life. On the other hand, we have to be aware that there is the possibility of conflict, - and it is one of the main goals in intercultural education - but also the ability to resolve it in a peaceful manner.

Therefore, it is a task of education working so that all people can assume their multiple belongings, to reconcile the need for identity with the opening to what is different: anyone who is able to assume fully its diversity may be a link between the various cultures and surrounding communities, an essential function in today's society.

Ballester, Ibarra and Devís say, *multicultural* is a descriptive concept while *intercultural* means a process of exchange and interaction we must promote in multicultural societies (Ballester, Ibarra and Devís, 2010, P. 548).

[2] For Teresa Aguado, cultural competence consists of knowledge and affective attitudes towards other cultures (Aguado, 2003, P. 38).

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