Inclusion and citizenship – plural cultural context of creativity and curricular innovation

Isabel Carvalho Viana, Ana Maria Serrano

Abstract: Inclusion and citizenship conceives the understanding of diversity as a space of collaboration between what is local and what is global. Generally, countries respond to the multiple challenges of an increasing globalised world by introducing changes in the different systems which organise these countries. There is an intention to generate structures capable of preparing countries for responding to the challenges of society, which intends to be based on experience, information, knowledge, life-long learning and in developing the ability to increase citizens' well-being.

Inclusion and citizenship – a plural, cultural context of creativity and curricular innovation consists of an ability to question ourselves about the possibility of re-imagining a plural and inclusive pedagogical/training, cultural and social space. It is within the citizen's interaction with the environment, with the personal and collective action contexts that the inclusion of everyone can be fostered in evolutionally more plural societies, in which the curriculum establishes the cultural and social legacy, promoting the development of meaning of the human activity, that may also be strengthened when supported by innovating and creative ways of doing it.

Keywords: inclusion, citizenship, innovation

Issue: 3/2010

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1. Introduction

Inclusion and citizenship, in the words of Perrenoud (2002), involves planning the transformation of school/learning communities, through an education that goes beyond the technical training, developing, on the contrary, the creative and intellectual work of every student, to the rhythm of the possibility to apprehend and understand inclusion and democratic citizenship.

Considering inclusion, a group of researchers share the following understanding concerning inclusion:

`We have a common understanding about **'inclusion'** as a process aiming at creating an appropriate environment for all children. Regarding pedagogical work this means to adapt concepts, programmes and activities to the needs and interests of the children, and not vice versa, i.e. to adapt the children. The arrangement of possibilities for the participation of all is implied. On a general level our understanding of 'inclusion' means that regarding

the needs of each person society has to develop conditions to include everybody ´(Kron, 2010:14).

To answer the researchers' understanding, the here and now should be completed by the assimilation of the Portuguese qualification plan (concerning the Portuguese context) within a constantly referred society of information/communication, of knowledge, of life-long learning and, nowadays so sought after, a bright, creative and innovating society. Indeed, it's public knowledge that, at least considering the political speech, a sustainable development requires more highly qualified citizens in any country. According to Yus (2002), we can easily find laws within the scope of education referring to integral education as a priority goal of the educational systems. The preamble and purposes of the laws state that education's main goal is the learner's full development; it is an integral education, an education that enhances every potentiality. This context questions if, indeed, educational systems are organised to provide an integral education, intended to increase the possibilities of personal and social inclusion (Beane, 2002). It is common to observe that, while the purposes emphasize integral education, those purposes soon fade away during the several stages of the development and learning process, losing its expression when materialized as outcomes of the various disciplines, in which the school textbook is in charge – crisis situation!

We have been hearing, for a long time now, about the crisis, it's `just around the corner´. For instance, the modernity crisis has led us into a progressive post-modernity[1], according to Pourtois and Desmet (1997). According to Giddens (1984), the modernity addressed by sociologists is the result of several kinds of discontinuities, concerning the period that preceded it. The changing process is a very rapid one, particularly in the technological field. Pourtois and Desmet (*idem*, p.23) mention that, according to Touraine, modernity forms the dissemination of the results of the administrative, technological, scientific and rational activities:

`It broke, therefore, with the religious finalism. It is the triumph of reason over every field: science and its applications, social life, education, justice, economy…, with the purpose of creating a rational society.´

Therefore, and still according to the authors view, modernity is made of a separation between the objective world, created by reason, and the world of subjectivity, which is individual-centred. Rationalization makes up the single principle concerning the organization of personal and collective life. Thus, it neglects beliefs and forms of organization that are not structured on scientific elements. Positivism has determined modernity within the scientific evidence. Instrumental rationality, founded in objectivity, didn't tolerate the researcher's subjectivity, if the researcher would like to have his/her work acknowledge as scientific work.

In order to obtain the triumph of reason and science, according to Pourtois and Desmet (*idem*, p.25), it's necessary to reject some things:

`(…) it's necessary to reject the idea of subject; it's necessary to repress feeling and imagination. Man is, therefore, exclusively subordinated to his reason. By doing so, he will be integrated in the social world, playing his role as a worker, a soldier, a citizen, and not so much as the actor of his personal life.

So, reason is an instrument of power and domination over man. This point of view had consequences concerning pedagogical thinking. Today, it's dangerous to disconnect the technical world from the subjectivity world. On one hand, we know modernity set an increase of knowledge in several domains and, on the other, its scattering in every direction created an excess of meaning, which resulted in a loss of meaning. Post-modernity is the ability to question ourselves, in a coherent and integrative way, of rebuilding a pedagogical, cultural and social space. Currently, we can observe the vulnerability of certainty, the fragility of knowledge is recognized, and an integrating vision of the universe is considered in order to re-establish union in a fragmented world, guided by exclusion. Pourtois and Desmet (1997) mention that whereas modernity seeks differences and sets distances, post-modernity seeks similarities and makes appearances complex, in order to motivate proximities and accumulate knowledge, creating numerous challenges for education and social inclusion.

The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century for UNESCO, headed by Jacques Delors (1996), underlines four cornerstones of education: *learning to know* (acquiring understanding instruments and processes), *learning to do* (to be able to decide and act within the environment), *learning to live together* (in order to participate and cooperate with others in every human activity, according to Bhikhu Parekh[2], in order *to create a feeling of collective belonging to a multicultural society*) and *learning to be* (vital dimension, which integrates the previous three). Delors *et al.* (1996:77) mention education should, more and more, impart evolutional knowledge and know-how:

`Education should, indeed, impart, in a sound and effective way, evolutional knowledge and know-how, adapted to the cognitive civilization, for it's the basis of competences in the future. At the same time, education must find and signal the references that keep people from being overwhelmed in schools of information, more or less ephemeral, which invade private and public spaces and make people turn into collective and individual development projects. Education must provide, in some way, the mapping of a complex and constantly agitated world and, at the same time, the compass which allows going through it´.

It's known that formal teaching is mainly set to the *learn to know* and not so much, if anything, to the *learn to do*. Covering the four cornerstones mentioned above will create curricular possibilities which allow learners to guide themselves according to the political, economic, cultural and social circumstances of knowledge that circulates in each society, where motivation and meaning are relevant (Jurjo, 2000). This makes up a commitment towards education, in which the creative and innovating Projecto Curricular Integrado (Integrated Curricular Project) is very important for inclusion, since it allows for and unifies the four cornerstones, giving them meaning and significance. Within the Portuguese framework, by reading the official documents, formal education contexts are subject to, we might say they point to a flexible and open curriculum, likely to be reconstructed and adapted to the different educational contexts, capable of promoting a new and creative dynamics across curricular improvement. In this context, the curricular improvement is seen as a dynamic process of decision-making, in which the teacher is the mediator between theory and practice, between the formal curriculum and educational intervention in learning schools/communities.   However, this conception requires teachers to attain knowledge, attitudes and competences which allow them to address the curriculum through an intervention and research perspective (Day;

Flores and Viana, 2005), making them, instead of users of curricular materials others created, architects of the curriculum, capable of developing educational projects and organize inclusive teaching-learning processes.

This attitude sets the professionalism of education/training professionals in an autonomous conceptualization, made of critical reflexion concerning decision-making, which develops in an environment of collaboration and a responsible, democratic and citizen-like participation of everyone in the common good that is education/training, as opposed to the *alienated individualism*, associated with the technical rationality models. According to Carr and Kemmis (1988), when curricular debate is solely focused on the technical issues concerning the instrumental efficiency of the several pedagogical methods, presents us a definition of curriculum as being a program which limits and obstructs, in our point view, the development of a *Citizen Culture of Inclusion*.

2. Culture and education for inclusion and democratic citizenship

As stated before, countries worldwide have been introducing changes in their educational systems in order to improve them. There is a concern about creating structures capable of preparing countries to respond to the challenges of a globalized society, based on experience, learning, knowledge and information. In this perspective, it is not enough to rely on more or less equipments in the computers, namely wireless networks, that can (and should) be installed in teaching/training spaces. It's especially important that a true learning space is planned (Grilo, 2002). We wait too long for school to provide us with answers to a multiple set of needs. One of which will be the development of democratic adaptive behaviours, through processes that value actors and their adaptive knowledge, articulated with the development of policies that boost the development of local experience. Thus, regional development is supported by the contributions of its actors shaping them within the local context and those democratic adaptive behaviours must be organized and explored in order to promote inclusion and democratic citizenship. Sacristán (2003: 187) states that locating the individual in society through his *citizen* condition was an essential purpose of modern education for

`(…) a democratic society and one of the most powerful metaphors to understand articulation between his responsibilities as a member of large organized social networks and the development of his individual freedom and autonomy.´

In the words of this author, and on a political level, *inclusion, citizenship* and *democracy* are in fashion, dominating political agenda, which shows a concern about its fragility and, also, because they are seen as the acceptable political regime and social organization for today. In the author's opinion, during the last two decades of the 21st century, the regression of the well-being state (due to neoliberal economic policies which determine inequalities) has lead to the wearing out of social rights. This fact highlights the need to renovate the rights of the citizens. The way the citizen is reacting makes democracy illegitimate. The author (*idem, ibidem*) states that:

`The clove in participation, mistrust and lack of interest of an increasing number of individuals, concerning the political withdrawing from the problems that daily affect those individuals, end up making democracy illegitimate as a way of government of public affairs. The onset of social movements – like the feminist – stresses certain claims

which report the non-compliance of basic rights within large groups. The multiple culture blends, a consequence of migrations, draws attention to the integration difficulties of individuals typified as unequal due to the fact of being different. The fall of the so-called real socialism regimes and the adoption of democratic system, in several countries, lead to the growing hopes of liberty and progress centred in "citizenship", as a condition which undertake and guarantee rights to exercise freedoms and allow certain material life conditions which enhance citizenship's development with dignity´.

The author still mentions that the integration of countries in wider organizations like EEC (European Economic Community) restrains its sovereignty, creates new settings for the exercise of citizens' rights, previously delineated by national sovereignty. On the other hand, we are seeing minorities claiming peoples' recognition, in order to develop their identity, emphasizing the universality issue of citizen's condition and recognizing themselves as different. This shows a citizenship that requires the adjustment of the focus given to the instability that is experienced when confronting new realities and facing issues that were not properly solved.

As a way to respond to the challenges which emerge from these complex contexts, the need to strengthen synergies in natural environments arises, and because of its uniqueness, these environments become significant for citizens of all ages. For instance, in the field of inclusion research, the interest in natural environments as a privileged space of natural learning opportunities for children has been the main focus of several anthropologists, psychologists and educators (Dunst, Trivette, Humhries, Raab and Roper, 2001). This attention in the child's natural contexts is also found in Mead (1954), in what she designated as `daily life situations and also in the contribution these situations provide to individual differences in regards to children's learning and development. The learning and development principles presented by Vygotsky (1978) also praise the natural contexts as the elements that provide the cultural, social and physical contexts for learning. These principles apply to *every* child, to every citizen, of all ages. According to McWilliam (2007), the child's learning does not take place in repeated trials, but instead, through continuous and disseminated interactions over time in the child's natural environments. Considering this, the special education services, promoted in response to the specific needs of the children, must be provided, preferably, integrated within daily routines and activities of the classroom, i.e., in a natural environment in which children stay most of their learning time.

Following this line of thinking, therapy and special education should occur in the classroom, usually with other children present and in the context of daily routines and activities (McWilliam, 2007). However, this approach calls for a good collaboration between all partners and a complex articulation for designing processes of significant teaching and learning, between regular early childhood teachers, the various professionals of special education services and parents, as well as the preparation of a plan for its implementation, and its development. Within this action plan, a way to evaluate the dimension of individualized instruction and its intensity is, according to McWilliam, Trivet and Dunst (1985), the level of active involvement demonstrated by the children, in learning activities that make sense and within the class. When describing involvement, McWilliam (2007) refers to the amount of time a child spends in interaction with the

environment, in ways that are developmental and contextual, appropriately and with different levels of competence.

Assuming this position, the curriculum is perceived as dynamic knowledge, in which complicity and imagination are more important and, if framed in a constructivist/critical, creative and innovating perspective, becomes relevant, because it points up the situational, complex and problematic nature of the decisions and practices concerning education/training, it assigns teachers/students/families a special role. Teachers are no longer mere executor-technicians of the curriculum, more or less capable, and have turn into deliberators/constructors/critics of that curriculum, standing out as reflexive mediators between the global project and curricular practices in differentiated contexts, in order to articulate educational/training work, engaging different participants in educational action (students, parents, teachers, trainers, environment and other social partners).

This perspective requires changes in school, learning and training spaces and in the professor/trainer profession, in which qualifications are necessary in order for them to take over responsibilities concerning intercultural/inclusive education/training that encourages a democratic citizenship. Under such a scenario, the reinvention of the school/training spaces and the teaching profession is vital (Viana, 2008). To answer substantively and significantly to the crucial qualification of teachers, the model of minimum skills training (Perrenoud, 1993), that persists on shaping the plans for initial and continuous teacher's training, definitely is not enough.

3. Final Remarks

The change brought by the continuous and increasingly rapid cultural, economic and social transformations amongst others, suggested to some and imposed to others, moves into a new area, there are challenges that the globalized world demands for democratic inclusion and citizenship which cannot be handled in a non-critical way. Unlike, they demand the construction of democratic inclusion and citizenship in a `brincriada´ (creative-play) approach[3], which takes us to a book by Mia Couto (2001) entitled *O gato e o escuro (The cat and the dark)*, that describes the `pintalgato´ (cat with dots) as a result of childhood imagination filled with wisdom, in which children can make things up, even in the dark, because dark only exists in the eyes of some men. This story is about light, the possibility to see beyond the abyss or ditch in front of us. In our reflexion, the `pintalgato´ illustrates the conflict of meanings and emotions triggered by a will of social cohesion substantiated on inclusion and democratic citizenship, on natural environments, in which we can observe educational/training community with profound wisdom, inventing, even deep in the dark, with a naive, but very real strength, that invents "Projects of its size" and that takes oneself beyond the fear and insecurity of not accomplish them (Viana, 2007).

Inclusion in more evolutionally plural societies can be promoted, within the relational environment of the citizen with his life action spaces; in those societies, curriculum supports the social and cultural legacy capable of offering a construction of meaning for human activity, much appreciated if powered by creative and innovating ways to practice it, because societies are guided to adopt better forms of personal and collective action.

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[1] For the authors, post-modernity isn't always designated in the same way, however, to them "Post-modernity: this is how we designate it and continue to do so, even though several authors (namely Touraine, 1993, or Giddens, 1994) chose to talk about a modernity reconstruction, because modernity critics shouldn't, according to these authors, lead to a anti-modern position, but, instead, to a rediscovery of modernity in all its reintegrated dimensions. According to them, we might be talking about a new modernity" (Pourtois e Desmet, 1997:21).

[2] According to the Courrier Internacional, Portuguese Edition, n.º31 –November 4th to 10th, 2005, pp.24-25, Bhikhu Parekh is an Indian Philosopher living in the United Kingdom, teacher at the *London School of Economics and member of the House of Lords. An expert in multicultural societies, he's the author of "*Rethinking multiculturalism: cultural diversity and political theory*", Harvard University Press, 2000.*

[3] N.T.: "Brincriada" – Name of a creative linguistic process used by the author Mia Couto, by creating new families of words, merging meanings.