

Dimensions of intercultural education in the twenty-first century

LA SOCIEDAD EUROPEA ES UNA SOCIEDAD MULTICULTURAL, Y LA EDUCACIÓN INTERCULTURAL ES TANTO UNA NECESIDAD COMO UN DEBER. EL RETO CONSISTE EN BUSCAR FORMAS REALISTAS DE PROMOVER LA EDUCACIÓN INTERCULTURAL. UNA GRAN PARTE DEL PENSAMIENTO SOBRE ESTE TEMA SE ENTIENDE EN EL CONTEXTO DE LOS CONCEPTOS DEL HUMANISMO LIBERAL, UNA EXTENSIÓN LÓGICA DE LOS DERECHOS DEL HOMBRE PROCLAMADOS EN LA ILUSTRACIÓN: SE PROCEDE DESDE LA LIBERTAD E IGUALDAD DE LOS INDIVIDUOS A LA LIBERTAD DE EXPRESIÓN DE TODAS LAS CULTURAS Y TODOS LOS GRUPOS, Y FINALMENTE A LA NOCIÓN DE LA IGUALDAD DE TODAS LAS CULTURAS. NO OBSTANTE, LAS SOLUCIONES LIBERALES QUE ENGENDRÓ ESTE PLANTEAMIENTO PARECEN INSUFICIENTES, PORQUE NO TIENEN EN CUENTA LA PERSONA HUMANA, SU PSICOLOGÍA PARTICULAR, O LA INFLUENCIA TRANSCENDENTAL DE LAS CULTURAS EN LAS QUE NACEN ESTAS PERSONAS. ES SIGNIFICATIVO QUE LAS SOLUCIONES QUE SURGEN EN LA POSMODERNIDAD VUELVEN A LA PERSONA, ABORDANDO CUESTIONES DE NATURALEZA AFECTIVA: LA RELACIÓN CON LA ALTERIDAD, LA AUTOESTIMA Y LA EDUCACIÓN DE LAS VIRTUDES. EL PROYECTO DE LA EDUCACIÓN INTERCULTURAL SOLO PUEDE REALIZARSE SI SE RESUELVEN ESTAS CUESTIONES. DESDE UNA BASE DE AUTOESTIMA Y VALORES SÓLIDOS, LAS PERSONAS PODRÁN SALIR A LA SOCIEDAD PARA NO SOLO VIVIR LA AUSENCIA DE PREJUICIOS, SINO LA SOLIDARIDAD CON LOS DEMÁS. EN ESTA PERSPECTIVA, LOS COLEGIOS CON IDEARIO RELIGIOSO PUEDEN REALIZAR UNA APORTACIÓN POSITIVA A LA EDUCACIÓN INTERCULTURAL, SI ENFOCAN EL TEMA CON REALISMO Y CONFIANZA.

PALABRAS CLAVE: EDUCACIÓN INTERCULTURAL, AUTOESTIMA, VIRTUDES, COLEGIOS RELIGIOSOS.

THE MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY IS ALREADY A FACT, AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IS BOTH A PRAGMATIC NECESSITY AND A MORAL DUTY. THE CHALLENGE IS TO FIND WAYS OF PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN PRACTICE. MUCH EARLIER DISCUSSION OF THIS ISSUE SHOULD BE SEEN AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF LIBERAL HUMANIST CONCEPTS, A LOGICAL EXTENSION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN

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PROCLAIMED AT THE ENLIGHTENMENT, MOVING FROM INDIVIDUAL LIBERTÉ AND ÉGALITÉ TO THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION OF DIFFERENT GROUPS AND CULTURES, AND ULTIMATELY TO A NOTION OF THE EQUALITY OF ALL CULTURES. HOWEVER, THE LIBERAL SOLUTIONS WHICH THIS APPROACH ENGENDERED SEEM NOW TO HAVE WORN SOMEWHAT THIN AS THEY DO NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE HUMAN PERSON, HIS OR HER INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY, OR THE ALL-PERVASIVE NATURE OF THE CULTURES INTO WHICH HE OR SHE HAS BEEN BORN. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT THE POSTMODERN SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS OF MULTICULTURALISM RETREAT BACK INTO THE PERSON, DEALING WITH QUESTIONS OF AN AFFECTIVE NATURE, THE RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERNESS, SELF-ESTEEM AND THE EDUCATION OF VIRTUES. ONLY IF THESE ISSUES ARE SATISFACTORILY RESOLVED CAN THE PROJECT OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION BE CARRIED FORWARD. FROM THE BASE OF SELF-ESTEEM AND SOLID VALUES, PEOPLE WILL BE CAPABLE OF GOING OUT INTO SOCIETY TO LIVE OUT NOT JUST AN ABSENCE OF PREJUDICE, BUT A POSITIVE SOLIDARITY WITH OTHERS. IN THIS PERSPECTIVE, SCHOOLS WITH RELIGIOUS COMMITMENTS HAVE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO MAKE TO INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION, PROVIDING THEY APPROACH THE QUESTION WITH REALISM AND TRUST.

KEYWORDS: INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION, SELF-ESTEEM, VIRTUES, DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT paper is to explain why I consider that intercultural education is necessary, and to discuss the implications of this, including the difficulties of putting it into practice.

One straightforward argument for intercultural education is that it is not simply one option among many: it is a practical necessity. We can no longer choose whether or not we desire to live in a multicultural society: in Europe, such a society is all around us. Moreover, even if we do happen to live in a fairly homogenous enclave, modern communications mean that we are inevitably in much closer contact with people from different cultural backgrounds than our ancestors ever were. One of the principal tasks facing education in the modern era has been to respond appropriately to social change; and today, one of the greatest changes taking place in many European countries is the transition from a fairly stable monoculture neatly packed within a nation-state, to a situation in which two or more cultures live side by side in the same geographical area, often in situations of inequality, while at the same time, the population of the developed world is becoming increasingly nomadic.

At this point, it is important to emphasise that European countries differ greatly in their self-image and self-understanding from countries such as the USA, where everyone is an immigrant, and a degree of unity is achieved through the Constitution and by educating people to be "American". In

Europe, land, religion, race, language, culture and customs are often so tightly bound up together that people are unable to distinguish one element from another¹. However, we also know that these very European cultures, which seem so monolithic, have evolved over time and will continue to evolve. One of the factors that will trigger the new cultural forms of the next few decades will be the influx of large groups of people from poorer countries, who bring with them different religions, languages, customs, and so on. These people and, above all, their children will have to decide what to keep and what to abandon, how far they can or should assimilate. Meanwhile, their host countries will have to determine how far these groups will be accommodated, helped to preserve their culture, or encouraged to assimilate. Just as education has both adapted to and, to some extent, propelled, social change in the areas of increasing social equality, the changing workplace, and the role of women in society, education will also be one of the most important arenas in which the drama of multiculturalism will be played out.

Although I feel that the major argument for intercultural education is that the multicultural society is already here, and probably here to stay, and that education has to respond to reality by opening up the way to communication between people of different cultures (hence “intercultural” rather than “multicultural” education), there is another way of looking at the issue which may seem to provide a simpler solution. This alternative argument takes the mainstream culture of a country to be the desirable culture for that country, and all other cultures present to be inferior in that context. The logical consequence of this is that all children, including immigrants, should be educated in the monoculture, in the hope that inconvenient differences will be obliterated in the upcoming generation. Although current in the past, this argument has fallen out of favour in democratic states, partly because of the general liberal desire not to impose more than is prescribed by law, and partly because of the pressure from minority groups who claim the right to practise their traditions, religion and so on freely². In some sense, the liberal state which is committed to freedom of religious expression, freedom of speech, and so on, is duty bound to allow its citizens to practise the religion they wish, eat what they like, wear what they like, and so on, within the limits of the law³.

¹ For a discussion of the typology of multicultural situations in the world today see Musolf (2001).

² For a more detailed analysis of the recent developments in multiculturalism, see Allemann-Ghionda (2001).

³ In Great Britain it is difficult for a Roman Catholic to argue against multiculturalism, because one of the first great liberal reforms allowing members of a non-mainstream cultural group to practise publicly, educate their children in their own religion and take a full part in public life was the Emancipation Act of 1829. Sadly, social prejudice took much longer to disappear. Curiously enough, much of the vocabulary all too frequently used today in the context of the Muslim world

We have seen that the multicultural society is already a fact, and that intercultural education is both a pragmatic necessity and a moral duty. However, this is only the beginning. The real challenge is to see how intercultural education can be put into practice. Several models have been proposed, from the somewhat static antiracist approaches of the 1960s and 1970s, to the more dynamic critical pedagogies which imply that society as a whole must be transformed (Prats, 2001 and Siraj-Blatchford, 1995). The intellectual background to the situation is complex. The notion of multiculturalism is itself a liberal humanist concept, a logical extension of the rights of man proclaimed at the Enlightenment. From individual *liberté* and *égalité* we moved to the freedom of expression of different groups and cultures, and ultimately to a somewhat vague notion of the equality of all cultures (Prats, 2001). However, the liberal solutions seem now to have worn rather thin. The anti-racist education of the 1960s and 1970s, rather like its anti-sexist counterpart, has proved unsatisfactory: these dry, cerebral solutions look excellent on paper, but they do not take into account the human person, his or her individual psychology, or the all-pervasive nature of the cultures into which he or she has been born. Our understanding of cultural diversity has now deepened to take account of cultural specificity, socioeconomic factors affecting families, gender variables, and the emotional and cognitive characteristics of individual people (Allemann-Ghionda, 2001). It is interesting that the postmodern solutions to the problems of multiculturalism retreat back from the social structures into the person, dealing with questions of an affective nature, the relationship to otherness, self-esteem and the education of virtues. Only if these issues are satisfactorily resolved can the project of intercultural education be carried forward. From the base of self-esteem and solid values, people will then be capable of going out into society to live out not just an absence of prejudice, but a positive solidarity with others.

But this itself begs a further question. To be strong, to have healthy self-esteem, one has to feel confident and valued in one's own culture. Only then can one reach out to people from other cultures and learn positively from that experience. Moreover, the situation is still more complex, for as Molinos (2003) says, contact with other cultures offers a wonderful opportunity for enrichment and growth, but for this to be possible, the child must first have absorbed the values and symbolic system of his or her own culture, and secondly, must feel accepted in his or her desire to open up to the other culture-accepted, that is, both by his or her own group, and by the group he or she wishes to encounter.

(intransigent, inflexible, dogmatic, refusal to adapt, unreasonable, have too many children, etc.) is highly reminiscent of the terminology used in Britain up to the present day to describe Roman Catholics.

The complexity of this problem is heightened still further by the fact that our own culture is in a state of crisis, *not* principally because of immigration, but because of the collapse of our traditional system of values, probably as a result of the rapid changes that have accompanied enormous economic growth since the Industrial Revolution. Whatever the ultimate reason for this, it is true to say that western Europe is increasingly abandoning its own cultural and religious heritage in favour of the values of the marketplace, to the extent that almost every area of human life is now conceptualised in terms of the consumer values of “choice”, “value for money” and “throw away and replace”. Against this panorama, there is a real danger that the deep values in our own culture, and in the other ancient cultures of the world, will be forgotten as the multicultural society is conceived of crassly as a kind of relativist cultural hypermarket in which people choose the trolley-full of values that suit them at that moment. In this case, the problem of multiculturalism is superficially resolved, because all the different groups in a particular society become more and more similar in their surface features, and the deeper values and beliefs which create differences between them are trivialised as a kind of “consumer choice” which is no more significant than the colour of one’s car (Rieff, 1993-94).

For people with strongly held moral or religious beliefs, this kind of relativism is unacceptable. But I would argue that it is particularly damaging for people who do not have a deep or transcendent culture, as it seems to preclude the necessity for such a culture by claiming that all is surface⁴. In fact, this kind of cultural relativism falls into the postmodern trap of losing sight of the person that is at the core of all his or her subjectivities. It is that person that we need to encounter in education, if we are to be successful in helping our students to grow consistently in values, to develop a moral sense, and to find a meaning in life that goes beyond the surfaces. The problem is that secular states and their national education ministries are not particularly well equipped to deal with this kind of issue, precisely because the mainstream cultures which they still more or less embody are in crisis⁵. It is probably true to say that the greatest hope for intercultural education lies, curiously enough, in the sector of religious schools. This kind of education, with its coherent moral and spiritual preparation, its rounded consideration of the human person, and its culture of respect for people who do not share all of its values, is in a position genuinely to equip

⁴ “Mass culture does not provide a vehicle for mutual understanding (...) for true intercultural learning to take place, the participants must be capable of cultural discourse in which they can learn something about each other without necessarily reaching consensus, and this is not possible if they are not capable of contemplation” Musolf (2001).

⁵ See Fleck (2001), for a discussion of the problem concerning the teaching of religion in Spanish schools.

students for an encounter with other cultures⁶. Religious schooling has sometimes been depicted as a manifestation of siege cultures (Bash, 2001); but this ought not to be the case. A proper grounding in one's own culture does not mean that one is rendered incapable of relating to people with different cultural roots⁷. We should not lose hope that intercultural education on the deeper level is possible. When Pope John Paul II meets Muslim, Buddhist and Jewish leaders, he does not let discussions slide into a morass of superficial relativism. He is fully aware that the time is now ripe for the world's religions to find ways of communicating peacefully and fruitfully: communicating, that is, on the highest level rather than the lowest (John Paul II, 1994).

Regarding the concrete situation of immigrant children, who are often both culturally and economically underprivileged, it is important for their host country to offer them specialised help of many different kinds, and to allow immigrant parents a particular role in determining the way these children are educated (Delpit, 1988). It would be wrong to alienate these parents at the first misunderstanding, and therefore cut off the only possibility of communication. Poor people with a lower level of education are bound to be defensive: in many cases their decision to move to another country to make a living was not a free and informed one in the sense that we would understand, and their arrival is usually followed by shocks and disappointment. It is the duty of the host country, which needs these people for the labour market, to do what it can to achieve social harmony. This may mean "imposing" the values of tolerance and respect, which tend to be most characteristic of a post-Christian liberal culture. However, there are very few values or social norms which can be imposed. As I said earlier, multiculturalism is a fact of life, and there is no way in which democratic states can change this situation.

To conclude, I would like to say that the future is uncertain, and there will no doubt be loss as well as gain. It is precisely for this reason that we have to make our children strong in themselves, so that when they encounter people who think differently they find themselves enriched rather than threatened. ■

⁶ On the values needed for intercultural living to foment understanding and solidarity see Prats, 2001. For detailed discussion of the students' psychological needs see González Torres (2001).

⁷ For a discussion of the situation of Muslim schools for girls see Weiner (1985), Brah (1992, 1993), Khanum (1995) and Parker-Jenkins et al. (1999). For examples of ways in which cultural bridging can be achieved in an educational context, see Stredder, 1995.

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