Interculturality Beyond Its Own Limits
Epistemological and Ethical-political Proposals

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ABSTRACT: Interculturality has been consolidated as an analytical category which is key in studies and discussions related to both the disciplines of Anthropology and of Education, particularly in the Latin American arenas. This article intends, first, to deepen the reflection on the paradoxes and ambiguities that the intercultural approach is currently facing due to the dominance of the discourses and strategies of multiculturalism in social and educational practices internationally. Second, it discusses some of the theoretical contributions in Anthropology and Education towards the definition of an epistemological framework for ethnographic research in the area of Education. Lastly, it discusses the ethical and political implications of research in Education using the intercultural approach.

KEYWORDS: citizenship, intercultural epistemology, intercultural ethics, intercultural politics, interculturality, participatory turn

Introduction

The reflections and proposals presented in this article are part of an open process aimed at rethinking ‘interculturality’, a conceptual construction that, particularly in Latin American contexts, has become central in contemporary anthropological and education debates. The need for thinking, questioning and discussing this issue has been a constant feature throughout the history of the INTER Group of Research on Intercultural Education, of which I am part. This group is an international and interdisciplinary team whose members share, although with different nuances and approaches, a perspective that acknowledges diversity as ‘normal’. These and other discussions in which I have had the opportunity to participate in recent years, what we have learned from the fieldwork in the framework of several research projects based on the intercultural education approach, as well as some personal experiences of what would fit under the definition of ‘multicultural groups’, all constitute the background of the issues posed in this text. I will start from certain paradoxes, ambiguities and vagueness which, from my point of view, diminish the transforming capacity of intercultural education in order to explore subsequently the possible territory of interculturality beyond those limits, formulated as an epistemological, methodological and ethical-political proposal.

Multiculturalism and the Paradoxes of Interculturality

From my point of view, beyond the terminological debate, there is a great distance between the exposition of what we broadly understand as ‘multiculturalism’ and the proposals contained within the intercultural perspective. In fact, in some areas of Europe and in Latin America it is frequent to define the intercultural approach precisely in comparison to multiculturalism. It is considered in the first place that multiculturalism focuses on cultural differences, essentializing them. This essentialization offers two aspects: on the one hand it presents human groups as the holders of a culture with clearly defined limits (approximately) and features that can be described (relatively); on the other hand it tries to define and control the subjectiv-
ities and identities – especially ‘certain’ identities and not others – defined according to nationalities, territories, religions, languages, and so on, thus contributing to the reproduction of the stereotypes on which social, political and educational discourses and practices are grounded.

In contrast, the intercultural approach questions the stability of structures and cultural features and insists on the impossibility of identifying cultures as ‘differentiated meaningful wholes’ (Benhabib 2006: 10). Culture is conceived as the environment in which human activity occurs and social relationships and interactions develop, and also as the product of the latter. Meanings, rules, ideas and beliefs are built, expressed, transmitted and transformed only by means of individuals creating, recreating and sharing within a cultural environment. Essentialized culture is thus perceived as a barrier which prevents us from ‘seeing’ each other and establishing reciprocal relationships (Abdallah-Pretteille 2001; Aguado 2009).

In the first case, the idea of culture is inadequate and insufficient to describe social reality. Whereas the latter is characterized by complexity, variability, inconsistency, conflict and change, the term ‘culture’ suggests homogeneity, coherence, stability and structure (Brumann, in Del Olmo 2003). Culture, understood as ethnic groups, identity or any traditional concept of ethnography, is only definable within an intersubjective context in which interpretations and meanings are exchanged in the framework of the relationships and interactions of human beings:

All these concepts redouble the ideology of the society from which they are extracted; in fact they are nothing more than symbolic forms that allow the meeting of certain human forces under the flag of an imagined community … (Amselle and M’Boloko 1999, quoted by Abdallah-Pretteille 2006)

This is the reason why contemporary anthropology is engaged in a dialogue with culture from a more dynamic perspective, related to the practices, meanings and representations through which social reality is built and sustained (Téllez et al. 2005). What we call ‘culture’ comes from the human process of building significance, a process carried out within the context of complex interactions in which practices of meaning, representation, organization and attribution are developed (Benhabib 2006). As Abdallah-Pretteille (2001, 2006) points out, in contrast to multiculturalism the notion of ‘interculturality’ emphasizes the dynamic features of culture.

Broadly speaking we can establish the distance between interculturality and multiculturalism by saying that the latter approach describes, classifies and labels human groups, developing at the same time, implicitly or explicitly, a hierarchy between them, while interculturality moves away from this descriptive approach of cultures to analyse how the cultural manifests itself by means of its social and communicative uses (Aguado 2009). In the same way, differences are not conceived as objective facts or inherent attributes of people. Instead, we analyse how they are built within relationship and interaction in a process of contrast and comparison that takes place in a certain social and historical context (Abdallah-Pretteille 2001; Jiménez Frías and Aguado 2002; Aguado 2009). Colonial expansion can be considered the clearest example of a socio-historic context in which cultural differences are ‘invented’ in order to legitimize the power asymmetry among groups (Mignolo 2003, 2005).

On the basis of the deconstruction of the concepts of culture and difference, the intercultural approach is presented as a discourse that is critical of the hierarchies established from the differences between cultural groups which serve to legitimize inequality, domination and exploitation. However, in the social imaginary, differences are still perceived as features which are intrinsic to certain people and groups, and it is usually accepted in an uncritical way that ‘they’ are the only different ones, defining certain groups according to their differences, while the rest are not. Thus, the difference of others is usually perceived as a threat or a problem (Gil Jaurena 2008; Mata and Del Olmo 2009).

Thus, the socio-historical context is crucial in the process of building differences; the perspective of the majority (understood of course not in numerical terms but related to power) is that which prevails in the definition of the ‘other’, establishing difference as a category itself that points out and justifies the distance between ‘us’, understood as a benchmark of ‘normality’ and the point of view from where the latter is defined, and the ‘others’, the conveyors of difference. The difference that defines otherness is based on social categories, usually concerning culture or ethnicity, race, gender, class and, more recently, immigration. In the European context, the category of ‘immigrant’ is being used, both in media and political discourse as well as in social intervention, to establish classifications, hierarchies and control, in a similar way to the rest of the traditionally acknowledged categories.

In order to avoid cultural essentialism and rigid social categorization, the intercultural discourse, to put
it simply, tries to put a critical focus on relationships and interactions, starting from the acknowledgement of the diversity of every human group. It thus proposes the use of different ‘lenses’ to observe social reality, the adoption of a new look that allows us to recognize and understand diversity and complexity. However, in a somewhat paradoxical way in my opinion, there is considerable research and socio-educational interventions based on an intercultural approach which are either developed in contexts broadly linked to immigration or focus specifically on groups characterized according to their ethnic group or other invented ‘cultural identities’ (such as ‘Latino’). I wonder if it is possible to end with the categories we question while at the same time we attempt to abandon them. From my point of view, this is one of the reasons why the proposals aimed at de-essentializing the intercultural discourse have not managed up to now to break up the connections between (essentialized) culture and social categorization, and neither have they been able to formulate, beyond discourse, a holistic perspective of diversity capable of facing the persistence of a social imaginary of difference. I also wonder if there is another social category we can link to an image of diversity with which we could carry out a critical and transforming analysis of human relationships and interactions. I will return to this idea later on.

Meanwhile, multiculturalism does not only offer a discourse or a certain perspective of analysis, but, as pointed out by Dietz (2003), it has grown stronger as a political strategy, which since the 1980s has managed to conquer some spaces of power for different cultural groups. The system used for this purpose has been the transformation of their claims into pedagogical contents and a higher presence of the same in the spaces considered as educational: namely state schools and University. The result has been a re-essentialization of cultural identities based on the success (albeit partial) achieved by this strategy. Thus, the core of the educational and, by extension, social debate remains focused on concepts such as culture, ethnicity and identity, contributing to the pre-eminence of the culturalist perspective. At a macro level, education authorities from different European countries describe the student population using preferably cultural categories such as ethnicity, nationality or language (Aguado 2006) as well as gender. As a consequence, the intercultural approach within the educational field is still being persistently associated with differentiated educational support for specific groups, most of them defined according to cultural criteria: whilst in Europe these are identified within the context of immigration, in Latin America they are minority ethnic groups and indigenous populations (Mata and Ávila 2011).

On the other hand, the analysis of different training needs carried out by the Group INTER in different educational and geographical contexts shows the connections established between cultural diversity and alleged deficits (usually attributed to migrants or ethnic groups) or problems associated with organization or social coexistence (Aguado 2006; Mata and Ávila 2011). In the field of formal education, teachers associate it with the lack of linguistic or academic requirements, cultural rules that hinder the teaching-learning process, the increase of conflicts in centres or difficult relationships with families (Aguado et al. 2008). In the social field, cultural diversity is identified with what does not obey the common rule or with exoticism (Osuna and Mata 2008). In this way, we distance ourselves from what is diverse (the diverse are always the others) in order to problematize or trivialize it, taking it into consideration only in its more superficial form. Meanwhile, socio-educational practices continue reproducing discrimination based on cultural difference by implementing specific programmes for specific groups and through the uncritical transmission of a mono-cultural curriculum (García Castaño et al. 1999). Hence, educational and social inequality is perpetuated and the ground is prepared for the preservation of inequalities and relationships of dominion and exploitation.

To all this, you have to add the incorporation of interculturality to the ‘official’ educational discourse, with the consequent loss of critical impulse and emancipatory capacity (Arpini 2007). This trend is strongly supported by educational authorities who, in more or less a deliberate way, mistake the multicultural composition of our societies for an intercultural society, considering success has almost been achieved. In consequence, the intercultural approach is no longer considered a priority, for instance, in the permanent training of teachers in Spain, while this has never been the case during initial training (see Aguado 2006), aimed at present at technological and multilingual improvement of teachers. The European Commission, in its various announcements for the development of socio-educational projects (Socrates and Lifelong Learning Programmes), has changed over from considering interculturality as a priority core of action to propose it as a cross-cutting approach. From my point of view, this cross-cutting definition of intercul-
Turlerality has occurred prematurely, at a time when this (we will still call it) approach is not sufficiently consolidated and has not achieved explicit development of all its epistemological and political implications. This way we discover that intercultural education, which aspires to be defined as a discourse interwoven in practice, is finally conceived as a metaphor (Aguado 2009) which refers to a possibility yet to become reality, except for minority and isolated practices, the so-called ‘intercultural archipelagos’ by Abdallah-Pretceille (2001).

The very term ‘intercultural’ should be considered ambiguous because, as pointed out by Mato (2007), it works as a mere descriptive category that refers to relationships between culturally diverse people, without providing any evaluative connotation. For this reason it is being used for very different purposes and in contexts as different as indigenous struggles or multinationals’ marketing strategies in international markets. It is often used as an adjective or a noun, although as stated by Aguado (2009: 19), ‘no event is intrinsically intercultural, and this quality is not an absolute of the object’. For my part, I agree with Walsh (2005) on the necessity of also conjugating interculturality as a verb, making it possible to think and act in a certain way. Because interpreting the world in an intercultural way is not enough; it is necessary to transform it in an intercultural world (Fornet-Betancourt 2006). Thus, analysing human relationships from an intercultural perspective is not sufficient; it is also necessary to contribute to a radical change of those relationships. For this purpose, I think we need to improve, beyond limits, ambiguities and paradoxes, the definition of interculturality, not only as an approach or metaphor, but also as a discourse-action which allows us to:

- Think in a different way, for which we will need to have an intercultural epistemology which recognizes and values the diversity of experiences and knowledge.
- Build a collective knowledge capable of delegitimizing inequality, dominion and exploitation in all its forms. This entails taking into consideration a participatory turn in methodology.
- Take part in social action in order to combat reification and the instrumentalization of people, focusing on solidarity as the basis of human relationships, for which we need a clear definition of the ethical-political project underlying interculturality.

A search of the traces of ‘what is possible and what is available’ indicates that the paths already opened in this sense are not few. I will now explore some of them.

Towards an Intercultural Epistemology

In the Europe of the late 1930s, Edmund Husserl, in view of the omen of the so-often repeated tragedy of fanaticism, totalitarianism, domination and massacre, asked himself how science could contribute to the meaning of human existence. Science, he observed, has no answer to specifically human problems; for science, subjectivity is an enigma as its own reductionism has led itself to become a mere understanding of facts accepted as ‘objective, real and true’, hiding and concealing the world of life (1991: 53). Although contemporary critical thinking has stressed the situated and contextual nature of knowledge, taking to pieces its certainty and the intention of universality, certain scientific methods and results still work as effective axes of the world’s social organization. The global expansion of the neoliberal ideology consolidates its political and economic power with the support of the technocratic knowledge, mostly held by experts and scientists. Meanwhile, other experiences and know-how remain hidden or pushed into a subordinate category, making them invisible for centuries by a hierarchy of knowledge which consecrates a unique rationality and characterizes the rest of experiences as ethnic, popular or local (Mato 2007; Walsh 2007).

The tensions between knowledge and power are, and have been, a constant feature in the history of humanity, tensions that Santos (2006) places in the struggle between two ways of understanding knowledge: knowledge as regulation, transformation of chaos into order, and knowledge as emancipation, liberation of the human being from any kind of domination. As stated by Santos, in its origin, the scientific rationality that accompanied the project of modernity developed into a balance between both trends, in the search for the knowledge of nature aimed at freeing the human being from any kind of bondage – God, tradition, customs – and building a society of free and equal individuals capable of making autonomous decisions concerning their own lives. However, the project of modernity is born in confrontation with the contradictions of the very context in which it is produced: a categorized and unequal society in which certain groups — slaves, women and children — are not con-
considered individuals, but objects of regulation and control. On the other hand, this project is already organized as a market society in which the means of production are in fact concentrated in the hands of a certain number of individuals and in which the majority of people have to sell their labour to be able to obtain resources, thus losing a great part of their autonomy. Finally, colonialism is the framework in which ‘the other’ is constructed and in which the geopolitics of knowledge consecrate Western thinking as the hegemonic epistemology. Dussel also stressed the double perspective of the idea of modernity: on the one hand as an emancipatory project by means of reason created in Europe in the eighteenth century and on the other as a global process that begins with colonialism and turns Europe into the centre of world history while the rest of humanity is considered the periphery: ‘Modernity’s Eurocentrism is exactly having mistaken abstract universality for concrete globality’ (1993: 13). Finally, for Santos (2006), it is the predominance of regulation over emancipation in the production of knowledge what leads to the hegemony of Western thinking.

Hegemony is conceived as a process of relationship among groups in which one dominates the others thanks to its capacity of transforming its particular interests into general or universal ones. The dominant group manages to make the dominated share its ideas concerning social relationships; this way it unifies thinking and action with the consent of the latter (Mezzaroba 2005; Brand 2006). At present, hegemonic processes prioritize the global expansion of neoliberal ideology, which consolidates its economic and political power with the support of the technocratic knowledge provided by experts and scientists, creating a new way of guaranteeing inequality and social supremacy (Schöller and Groh-Samberg 2006). This is the reason why the issue of how to build an epistemology which supports solidarity and sustainability reveals itself as urgent and fundamental, and for that purpose it is crucial that we deconstruct the logics that have been strengthening this hegemonic process during the last 500 years. Mato (2007) argued that the categories of Western thinking and scientific rationality which have constituted a hegemonic epistemology are not based on any kind of certification coming from an interplanetary agency, but on colonial expansion and the domination and subordinate relationships established by these processes.

Several authors (Dussel 1993; Quijano 1993; Mignolo 2003, 2005) identify the origin of this predominance linked to a specific historical process, colonialism, and to the development of a logical structure which sustains and justifies it, ‘coloniality’. Coloniality constructs cultural differences to legitimize colonial differences, that is, the asymmetry of power. This way, it produces and reproduces these differences of power by adducing they are culturally based, through a strategy consisting of classifying human groups according to their shortages or excesses in opinion of the group that classifies, whose perspective becomes superior and universal.

Castro-Gómez (1993) analyses how modernity, together with the attempt of controlling the uncertainties of life through knowledge, also includes a project of rational organization of society. This attempt of control and social organization manifests itself outside the West through the creation of opposed identities – colonizer/colonized – which are excluding and incomunicable and which legitimize colonial exploitation while implementing a ‘fair’ policy aimed at civilizing the colonized. At the domestic level, with the guarantee of the nation-state, it attempts to create homogeneous identities which allow the formulation of a common project, valid for everyone. Social science is formed precisely in this context of colonial power as the ideological machine needed to produce and legitimize identities and otherness and as the science ‘of’ society, whilst it observes from an external position and defines the homogeneity of its look as objectivity. Although some social science challenges coloniality, much of it has never carried out a clear epistemological breaking-off with colonial logic and ideology. Hence, it still considerably legitimizes inequality and exclusion of all those who do not comply with standard profiles useful to the system, as well as relationships of domination and exploitation which contribute to social reproduction.

Intercultural strategy should be aimed at building knowledge beyond these narrow epistemological limits. It should begin by rebuilding social science through the creation of spaces of dialogue among different kinds of logic, learning and experiences, from an epistemological ‘pluriversality’. For this purpose, intercultural epistemology should start from a position aimed at the decolonization of thinking, the acknowledgement of epistemic rights for non-Western cosmologies and the establishment of a collaborative dialogue between different kinds of logic (Mignolo 2003, 2005; Santos 2004, 2006; Mato 2007; Walsh 2007).

But now the question is how do we undertake this change in the geography of knowledge? Santos (2004,
2006) suggests building a ‘cosmopolitan rationality’ project. His proposal starts from the verification of the diversity and range of learning and social experiences in the world, which highly exceed what the Western scientific tradition knows or considers important, and which constitute a vast source of knowledge that is being wasted. Thus, a first step to advance in the building of an intercultural rationality should be aimed at the recovery of this knowledge, removing the exoticism and problematization with which they are usually addressed. This rationality should also be developed from a logic which allows not only the recovery of the huge social experience accumulated and the great quantity of learning ignored, but also the implementation of translation work which does not become a new hegemonic strategy. The creation of a reciprocal intelligibility among experiences is fundamental, identifying common concerns and the different answers to these. In this sense, the contribution of Salas-Astrain (2003) is interesting; he stresses the need of mediators who are familiar with the different contexts involved and are thus capable of carrying out an intercultural reconstruction of the discourses.

The intercultural universities of Latin America emerge with the intention of becoming places where the training of this kind of mediators is carried out. Their creation is framed in an ‘interculturalization’ process of higher education institutions, which intend to achieve social, political and even legal recognition of diversity in the public universities of Latin America (Dietz and Mateos 2010). The dialogue of wisdoms – ‘the ecology of knowledge’ in the words of Santos (2005) – is part of both their objectives and their learning processes and research methodology.

The Intercultural Veracruzana University, for example, articulates this dialogue in three fundamental dimensions: intercultural, inter-actoral and inter-lingüe, aiming at hybridizing and diversifying knowledge. This university adopts an integral education model in which the curriculum is organized around ‘educative experiences’ (instead of the classic or traditional subjects), and the research agendas are linked, integrated and engaged with the communities where the university centres are established. Since the beginning of the programme, students have a very active role in their learning process, as mediators and actors in the communities’ social and cultural contexts. The fundamental principle is the re-valorization of the indigenous cultures, which becomes the quintessential element in the articulation of the diversity of knowledges that come from asymmetric and sometimes antagonistic cultural systems. Thus, it is very important to stress the ethical-political commitment in relation to the transformations that might happen in the communities the students are connected to.

The nurturing of ‘talents that prioritize the harmonic relation between Nature and the human being’ is the principal mission in the Intercultural University Amawtay Wasi in Ecuador (Walsh 2007; Sarango 2009). In this case, the intercultural proposal is based on a theory whose principle is the ‘relationality’, that assumes an epistemic perspective based on the reciprocity in the exchange of knowledges and in the collective construction of knowledge. This integral-community oriented education model is based on research aiming at the resolution of conflicts and interventions needed in the community.

Discussion: Going Further in the Intercultural Ethical-political Project

The development of intercultural epistemology requires circumstances to allow dialogue between the different types of knowledge on equal and reciprocal conditions. These cannot be built only through learning intercultural attitudes and abilities; it is also necessary to question in a critical manner the economic, social and political issues, in the framework of the tensions between the affirmation and denial of differences, and power relationships. An analysis of the present power dynamics shows globalized capitalism as the canvas on which the human, ecological and civilization crisis we are living in is painted, some of whose more alarming symptoms are:

- The increasing social polarization, with a high concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of an increasingly reduced number of inhabitants of the planet, and a significant rise of inequality and exclusion.
- The reconfiguration of relationships between capitalism and work, the consequences of which are massive movements of migrants, unemployment and overexploitation of workers.
- The destruction of the environment, with its devastating effects, caused by the paradoxical belief in an unlimited quantitative economic growth within a limited planet.

These changes in human life are happening with such intensity and speed that we perceive ourselves as
having no control over our own lives and the impact they have on the environment, and being powerless in view of the global challenges and urgencies we are facing. Interculturality should explore and put at stake critical instruments to recover this control and promote a human emancipatory process. For this purpose it is crucial to go further in the analytic-discursive field and focus on the practical one, explicitly formulating a transforming ethical-political project, an intrinsically pedagogical project which should be considered as a constant, reflective and open process, built in a participatory and cooperative way in locally and globally interrelated communities. The question here is: which are the ethical-political contents we can turn to in order to transform inequality, dominion and exploitation into reciprocity, solidarity and cooperation? I personally believe that the ethics of recognition and participation as a political principle provide us interesting tools to make this movement.

Recognition and involvement are, in human relationships, previous to the awareness of others. This statement of Honneth (2007) radically confronts the reification and instrumentalization of individuals. Reification is a human conduct that dehumanizes other individuals when dealing with them, not according to their human qualities but as ‘things’ or ‘merchandise’. This behaviour entails the loss of the capacity of getting involved with people or events and the transformation of individuals into passive observers of the environment and their own lives. Reification is either an ‘oblivion’ of previous recognition due to heeding the social practice in which we are involved (for instance in economic exchange) or the denial or resistance to the individual caused by a prejuduce or a stereotype, as a consequence of the adoption of an ideology, a specific perspective of the world. Reification or self-reification entails not only forgetting or denying previous recognition, but also ignoring the multiple existential meanings that world conveys for other people and for us. In a context in which reification is favoured by the abstraction of life, whose meaning is lost in the labyrinth of the neoliberal technocracy, intercultural ethics entail promoting the encounter with others in conditions that do not allow us to forget recognition, developing comprehension, empathy and intraception, creating and spreading spaces of intersubjectivity where it is possible to build intercultural hermeneutics; spaces where needs, expectations and experiences of people, as well as different beliefs, interpretations and world views are taken into consideration, and where participation becomes a political principle.

In this sense, I believe that social research can play an essential role as the detonator of social change, but for that purpose change must begin through methodology, promoting a participatory turn that contributes to generate a democratic change in the process of knowledge production, reproduction and legitimization. It is thus fundamental that we accept the artificiality of the theory–practice dichotomy, recognize that all people have valuable knowledge and experiences for the collective production of social knowledge and take into consideration both the autonomy of people and their capacity to have an influence on their own environment. Participatory action research, activist ethnography, militant research, co-research and the systematization of experiences constitute a rich source of methodological experiences which focus on the dissolution of the subject-object relationship in research, the participation of all the agents in knowledge production and the free circulation of the latter with the purpose of contributing to social transformation. Ethnographic methodology contributes with significant instruments for this type of research. At the same time, we need to point out the increasing trend, in quantity and intensity, of experiences in the field of education that promote the development of participative processes such as ‘comunidades de aprendizaje’ (learning communities) or intercultural universities, previously addressed.

For my part, I likewise intend to move away the focus of the analysis from the categories linked to cultural identities and explore the possibilities of a category which is potentially capable of including diversity, historically linked to the participation of people in society: citizenship. Although it is not exempt from contradiction, it tends to place people on a horizontal and reciprocal level within the public space, and entails their participation in the formulation and implementation of a project of society. Global emergence of new social movements such as the broadly named ‘Primavera Arabe’ (Arab Spring), the ‘15M’ Spanish movement, ‘Occupy Wall Street’ in the U.S. or the ‘#Yosoy132’ in Mexico implies a deep reconceptualization and reconstruction of citizenship, which affects both its meanings and practices. These processes are being carried out through the development of a multiplicity of elements: logic, proposals and alternatives (theoretical and practical) concerning coexistence and social organization which question both the need and possibility of adopting unique
models, and highlight the inadequacy within the present context of some traditional meanings of citizenship, such as its connection to a territory or nationality, its consideration as a relationship between individual and state or its function as a passive guarantor of rights (Mata 2011). This ‘new citizenship’ (Moro 2008) is a complex conceptual construction that encapsulates the practices that different groups (associations, movements, communities, different types of organizations, networks, etc.) develop in relation to a broad array of issues (environment, exclusion, culture, education, health, development, cooperation) founded on participation and collective engagement. This new conceptual construction promotes transformation of social interactions particularly towards the strengthening of horizontality and reciprocity.

Acknowledgements

This article was written within the framework of the research project ‘Active Citizenship Learning: Discourses, Experiences and Educational Strategies’ (EDU2009-09195), funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation, Spain.

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Notes

1. From the intercultural approach, which I share, cultural diversity is perceived as a feature applicable to any human group; however, the perspective implemented by the majority usually applies the category of ‘multicultural’ only to those groups which unite people from different languages, nationalities, religions, etc.
2. As I will analyse later on, on many occasions we find very similar practices under these two different categories, both from the positive and negative points of view.
3. Here I refer to immigration as a social category developed particularly in the European environment, including under a homogeneous whole people who have been living a migratory process from South to North, ignoring, among other considerations, the different circumstances in which it occurred. Immigrants’ children are usually included in this homogeneous whole and classified under successive ‘generations of immigrants’, even when they have been born and educated in the receiving country.
4. I use this term to refer lack of required or necessary quality which is persistently associated to certain groups, especially in educational settings.
5. It means an approach that should imbue any educational programme or initiative; in Spanish we use the term ‘transversal’.
6. I have borrowed this expression from Boaventura Santos, who uses it to refer to knowledge and practices which sustain the development of social creativity and the construction of specific alternatives of organization and relationships.
7. I use the term ‘decolonize’ as Walsh (2005) does; she introduces the distinction between ‘decolonization’ as a political process and ‘decoloniality’ as an epistemological construction.
9. The introduction of the concept of reification mainly corresponds to Martha Nussbaum.
10. Husserl’s concept that refers to the capacity of feeling through rapport with another conscience. This is not a transcendental experience but one driven by the body.

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