The Importance of Intercultural Education in Developmental Age

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Abstract

The multicultural society has inevitably led to the coexistence of people from different worlds and with mentalities, traditions and habits that may diverge significantly from those to which we usually refer. The multicultural reality has not yet been accepted by all and even less valued. So we need to find those roads that can promote the growth of an open mentality able to welcome diversity and to create a real intercultural dimension. Since in a cross-cultural context the relational dimension acquires a particular importance, it is essential to consider the social dimension of the child and the role of the educational figures that revolve around him. In order to clarify the issues that may arise in the integration of foreign children, I want to emphasize how crucial the role of the educator is in facilitating their academic inclusion. For the purposes of the current analysis, I adopted the method of theoretical research and I examined the extensive literature on the subject.

Keywords: intercultural education; children; academic inclusion

1. Introduction

Multicultural society inevitably led to the coexistence of people who come from different worlds and who have mentality, conventions and habits which could be considerably away from the ones we refer to.

The multicultural reality, which is not yet accepted by all nor valued, needs to find those paths that can foster the development of an open-minded mentality that embraces who is *different* from us and evolves in a real intercultural dimension.

If it is true that every man has those peculiar characteristics that associates all the human species, from which his fundamental rights rise, it is also true that every man is *different* from his counterparts due to his congenital physical

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characteristics and, above all, to the original personality that comes from his original culture, that fundamentally contributed to build his personality.

2. The Educative Action Commitment to Promote the Transition from the Multicultural Educational Model to the Intercultural One

In interpersonal relations, one is always up against *others that are different*, individuals with similarities and differences. These differences, especially in the cultural field, are more identifiable in individuals belonging to different ethnic groups. Therefore, in order to elicit and foster the transition from multicultural to intercultural, the *educative action* commitment has to be undertaken. We know that there is not an age when education ends, precisely because what distinguishes a person is his constant dynamism. However, it is acknowledged that educative action is of fundamental importance especially in the *developmental age;* that is during the years defined by physical and mental development of each individual, in which everyone's own personality is moulded.

On this side, we can assert that the educative action in relation to the interaction with *those that are different*, on one hand it supports each individual in developing his full and balanced personality, on the other hand it leads the individual to the formation of the common sense of belonging which definitively underpins the prospect of social coexistence (Dalla Torre, 1992, p. 54). This is an important element of nowadays society in which there are often acts of intolerance against immigrants, including children.

In the wide field of education, we now want to focus on the useful elements in order to raise and live with *diversity*. This means we need to foster in individuals the knowledge of the multiplicity of the social, historical and cultural values in the world, not to come to the elimination of diversity, but to achieve a balance in these values through a process of acknowledgement, dialogue and respect (Durino Allegra, 1993, p. 18).

The belief that education is an act of love toward *those that are different* must be the fundamentals of education and of those who strive to carry out it. Therefore not only an individual is recognized for who he is, but it is helped to become more deeply himself and a free and conscientious person. And since every person has his personal history, culture and friendships as well as family, ethnic and religious relationships, to educate a person means to help him to rise into his historical and cultural identity.

What the present society shows us is a multiplicity of worlds which need interaction for mutual survival.

3. How to Promote Immigrants Integration in Hosting Society

In order to foster interaction with those that are different, educative action has to be pointed not only to foreigners but also to locals, for this is the only way to make possible unity in diversity, coexistence and integration without cancelling one's identifying characteristics (Dalla Torre, 1992, p. 54).

This path has to be followed since tender age in order to grow up with those dispositions and skills that represent the prerequisite to make adulthood open to the education that it will further need (Secco, 1992, pp. 7-50; 279-282).

Towards those who are in a foreign land we should bear in mind that an immigrant may even reject the country from which he fled but he will never lose a love-hate relationship with his native land (Demetrio & Favaro, 1992, p. XVIII).

The link with one's cultural roots is more strongly felt by adults who left their homeland but it is also noticed on their children. Just think at the use of their mother tongue, at the different food and religious habits found in the families that are, in consequence, handed down from parents to children. An educative project has to consider all this and promote a range of initiatives that prepare people for integrating more in the world that hosted them, keeping their own ethnic and cultural identity.

Furthermore, who has the responsibility of educating has to make an effort so that the best emotional conditions and the best atmosphere are created in order that a child or an adult would feel accepted and so acknowledged in his specificity (Demetrio & Favaro, 1992, pp. XVIII-XIX).

Projects with purposes, objectives and verifiable paths could be realised only if the basis would be this emotional assumption, in which everyone could feel loved for who he is, accepted and welcomed without discrimination, esteemed and valued with his cultural baggage.

It is essential that an *empathic relationship*, characterised by respect, loyalty, harmony and mutual confidence (Angori, 1995, p. 30) would rise and grow. These are fundamental elements to help each individual to develop and mature his own personality in the most full and balanced way.

A last element that we should highlight is that *education to otherness* should not be seen only as depending on interculturalism, even if this purpose is an urgency imposed by society: an aim of this education is also to help the person to become increasingly aware of his own identity.

In this regard, we try to understand the connection existing between the development of the personal and the sociocultural identity. Here we do not want to discuss the different theories about identity development in everyone's developmental process; it is of importance to highlight the key role undertaken by the relation with *the other*; that is meeting with *people that are different,* building up one's personality.

Personal identity is the result of interaction between genetic factors and elements from the outer environment which the individual comes in contact with, between what according to us belongs to the *innate* category and all relations and acquisitions generated by the surrounding environment.

With *cultural identity* we mean what is given to a person from the outside reality and becomes part of his personal baggage.

Identity is the expression of a continuous constructive process, based on a continuous flow of interactions between the individual and the environment, in which a special resource of the individual that gives direction, legitimacy and originality to development is revealed and manifested (Papparella, 1994, p. 167). This is a dynamic interaction that is continuously evolving, even if we have to find its principal features, its specific characteristics in the early years of our life, especially in relations established in those days.

Identity is a dynamic reality that evolves over something that is already entrenched and it adds new characteristics without erasing what already exists. It embodies two fundamental dimensions: the relationship with ourselves and the relationship with others.

In the relationship with himself, an individual have to mature a balanced self-perception, a balanced perception of his positive features and limits, confidence in his potentialities that allows him to look at the world as an individual bearer of originality, with features similar and at the same time different from those of the other people.

To achieve this it is necessary to have a relationship with others, in which recognition gains in importance, that is the value others confer us: the opinion others have towards us has a crucial value, whether this opinion is adopted as negative or positive. In the first instance, it will be difficult that self-confidence, crucial to express oneself as a balanced personality, would increase and develop; on the contrary, in the second there will be more possibilities that the individual would achieve a balanced development of his personality, though suffering the unavoidable frustrations encountered during development. Furthermore, in the relationship with others everyone has the possibility to show his originality and at the same time the need of similarity that expresses the wish of acknowledging and of feeling acknowledged as belonging to a group, to a community that shares certain values (Cesari, 1992, p. 102).

Hence there is a continuous interaction between subjects and objects, recognizable not only in the environment but in everything that is outside ourselves: due to this complementarity of internal and external factors we build our identity.

Bearing in mind that reality outside us is a multicultural reality, it is clear that everyone has to get into a relationship with others that is richer and more complex than the recent past. It is like a third element has come into play: what is inside the individual; what is given by the culture in which the individual is included; what is offered to the individual by "other" cultures that entered our country. This involves firstly the awareness of the situation in which we live. It involves also the assumption from who has the task as an educator, of methods that, though offering everyone the possibility of grasping the cultural baggage that built his personality until then, accept what other cultures offer, with the awareness that it could contribute in developing his identity.

4. Conclusion

In the issue concerning interculturalism the core is the *person* as it is, the *man*, unique and unrepeatable individual that relates to his counterpart, which is unique and unrepeatable like him (Portera, 1999, pp. 86-88).

Defining different cultural belonging as a fundamental *value* is the prerequisite of every anthropology, even if the basis on which lays the ground of human dignity are different.

So to every man must be granted the possibility to settle down and raise a family; to pursue a job suitable to their family subsistence; to be free to reveal and profess his religion; respecting other human beings who bear his same values and with whom he build the society in which he lives.

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