From Multiculturalism to a New Notion of Citizenship

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From Multiculturalism to Interculturalism

In a previous work (Hernández, 1999), I refer to the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism to consider the relationships between cultures. The multicultural perspective could be defined as the recognition of the fact that other people are different beings, what it does not mean is to establish links or exchanges among different groups. The United States' notion of *melting pot* (people are different even if they use the same language and have similar social values) represents the ideal of this conception.

The concept of interculturalism is opposed to this view. Campani (1993) set the origin of this notion at the beginning of the seventies, in relation to the problems of bilingualism or multilingualism in Europe. Special classrooms for immigrant children were established in different schools in order to make their process of adaptation to the new cultural and linguistic situation much easier. In this process the need for teaching them their own mother-tongue and culture was also introduced. The debate during the seventies was moving from the school to society, and from an interest in language to a notion of an original cultural identity that most immigrants wanted to preserve, along with their process of adaptation to the new countries, societies, and culture.

During this period, some European countries (United Kingdom, Belgium or Spain) were constructing a new notion of identity placed in the acceptance of pluricultural realities where the unitary notion of the State was modified to accept the pluralism of regions, languages, and cultures inside it. The vision of the State as *a country of countries* was emerging to incorporate a common and different political, economical, and cultural frame.

This situation is not new for Europeans, because mutual cultural influence through knowledge, arts, science, and beliefs among different communities has been a common experience for them in their construction of reality. The new presentation of the artworks at London's National Gallery, organised chronologically and not by National Schools, could be considered as an illustration of this new approach to European citizenship (O'Hara-Foster, 1998). Hence, the idea of cultural identity is something more complex than the reductionism brought up by the sentiment of nation, language, or ethnicity.

The debate about interculturalism has opened the necessity of changing the discourse and the social and school practices regarding immigrants. From an assimilationist perspective, we are now moving far beyond the need of respect and recognize differences (multicultural approach), to a deeper debate (intercultural approach). In this debate the focus is not upon the integration of immigrant families

but on the recognition of *others*, not only with respect to their living experiences (cooking, tales, folklore, etc.) as many school programs frequently point out when dealing with the notion of multiculturalism, but also as a way of widening the recipients national experience by learning from each other.

Recognizing and understanding all the wisdom coming from all sorts of people has been the prevalent attitude within an intercultural notion. This concept focuses on communication and the notion of learning from each other as the main issue of cultural exchanges. The aim of this approach is to redefine the discourse about the conditions of an intercultural exchange. An intercultural approach, as Campani (1993) pointed out, "considers cultural differences under a dynamic and not static form, similar to the relationship between two human beings or two cultures" (p. 8) without hierarchies. It is based on mutual exchange.

Nevertheless, this debate is not new, because since 1973 the European Council has adopted the humanistic notion of interculturalism as a guarantee for all immigrant children to be educated in a bilingual and bicultural school context. However, rhetoric wishes do not always reflect reality. Interculturality is like a horizonline—everybody knows it is impossible to reach it, but it is necessary to care for it in order to obtain a fairer and more human life. For this reason, European educators and social researchers are talking about interculturalism rather than multiculturalism. The difference between these two terms also includes a new social and educational awareness about the relationship among people from different cultural roots.

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An example of this new consciousness can be observed in the current construction process of the European Union. In this context, European plurality and diversity provides essential ethical references, fundamental knowledge and vocational aptitudes that enable European people both to find their way in life and to be able to debate models of society and citizenship they would in a varied fashion like to promote and build.

This view has fundamental consequences for the educational system. The aim of promoting this European dimension in education is not merely to provide school curricula with facts on history, geography, or art across Europe or to develop a kind of folklore European culture. The objective seems to be building conscienceness of a common citizenship that can benefit most people. This notion means, as the European Commission (1996) has pointed out, an essentially humanistic idea designed to construct a democratic Europe that seeks a balance between economic, technological, ecological and cultural considerations.

However, citizenship is not simply a collection of behavioural principles based on common values and norms. Citizenship is a multifaceted idea. It is to be understood as a social practice, as a normative idea, and as a relational practice. It also has *democratic, egalitarian, intercultural and ecological dimensions.*

In order to make the notion of citizenship operational for future educational research programs, consider three characteristics sited by the European Commission (1996) as distinctive of European common identity: a) Citizenship is re-

lated to the kind of society we want to live in: Citizenship is thus a normative idea. Contemporary democratic citizenship is therefore allied to the concept of civil society and its moral/ideological defence. Citizenship creates a new space for expression, a space that inserts itself into existing ideas of citizenship but does not replace them. b) Citizenship is thus a dynamic notion that evolves in a dynamic process, in which the sense of belonging is shaped through differences, communication with others, conflicts and negotiated compromises, and mutual images. But a nonnegotiable foundation remains: the democratic human rights. c) Citizenship is located at the structural and interactional interfaces between the individual, the state, and the community. It is therefore a political practice whose terrain of development is people's social situation and political participation. Active citizenship demands the acquisition of cognitive and communicative competences through social and educative processes.

This model of citizenship is based on a *political culture of democracy*. It is through tolerance and solidarity that we become capable of distilling non-contradictory and mutually acceptable values. On that basis, we can cooperate with each other, caught up in global competition. We can maintain the spiritual foundation of Europe's humanistic values. At the same time, Europe can thus develop an open and continuous global dialogue with other people and cultures. It is not difficult to argue that in order to achieve such an atmosphere the education and training experiences European children and adolescents enjoy or go through will play an essential role.

As the European Commission (1996) pointed out, education for active citizenship is essentially a question of education for individual empowerment. This basically means, the development of people's critical faculties and the ability to make considered judgements by learning how to analyse and understand one's own life circumstances and value positions in comparison with those of other individuals and groups. The skills herein involved are analogous to the research skills, in particular, those practised in modern ethnography or as developed through intercultural education. This situation leads to the necessity of carrying out cross-European studies to locate and compare the teaching and learning issues related to the promotion of new European citizenship values among children and adolescents from this critical perspective.

References

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