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Intercultural Pedagogy: A Methodology for Contemporary Society

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Abstract

Major societal transformations have occurred worldwide in the twentieth century, and more markedly in the last decades, affecting the social, cultural, political and economic spheres of human activity. Such transformations contributed to the realization of Marshall McLuhan's prophecy about the advent of the "global village", characterised by the growing expansion of mass communication and mass media, by the birth of new economic markets and significant geopolitical changes. The latter, usually identified via the term "globalization", evidence a shrinking of distances and a growing number of ties between the most diverse territorial realities and, above all, greater mobility resulting in numerous and varied migratory directions.

Keywords: intercultural, pedagogy, methodology, contemporary, society

Introduction

A greater cultural, economic, scientific and religious pluralism distinguishes today's society, urging the individual inhabiting it to adapt to the incessant flow and circulation of things, people and ideas, and to master new multimedia and technological systems through previously separated spheres and fields which are now interconnected and interdependent.

Within the context briefly outlined here, intercultural pedagogy emerges as a necessity. Any reflection on it must begin with an epistemological differentiation

among the concepts of multi-, pluri-, inter- and trans- culture, sometimes mistakenly used in everyday discourse. Interculture characterises itself as a critical exercise able to restore a plural memory, through which we can recognise the positive value of cultural diversity, and of the communal character of humankind, made of exchanges, borrowings, intersections, hybridisms. Discourse must include a meditation on the concepts of personal identity and of alterity, so that we can learn how to look at and interpret reality from multiple, varied interpretative stances, and compare these different interpretations. The aim is to realise how multiple readings of reality provide us with a much more articulated and complex image of reality. Identity, alterity and an innate need for interaction, exchange, dialogue, and communication are fundamental categories for intercultural pedagogy, whose educational goal is the development of open, flexible, anti-dogmatic and inquisitive thinking. Such thinking is capable of putting aside its mental references and values, of meeting other cultures, of acknowledging and understanding analogies and differences, and of going back to its culture enriched by the encounter and the comparison with others. Strengthening the identity of the individual or of the group is a necessary condition for intercultural pedagogy.

The school is the institution most directly involved in providing an intercultural education. Its task is to develop a critical thinking, a mindset open to dialogue and to interrelationship. In the current (and so complex) historical phase, when our coasts are, almost on a daily basis, the landing place for entire migrant communities, intercultural education is a vital priority and opportunity to lay the foundation for a common and solidary history. In order to meet such a crucial objective, school is paramount; however, the educational model characterising it, historically too rigid and limited in scope, its curricula and teaching methodologies must be redesigned in order to meet new goals. It would not be fair to disavow the accomplishments of this institution over the last few years driven by the urgency and pressures exercised by the incoming migratory flows; yet its structural foundations remain ossified and monocultural.

Method

Today the term “interculture” has become a key word, not just within specialised language, but also in everyday speech. Especially in the latter, interculture is a shorthand for a vast array of behaviours, attitudes, actions and measures or a “passe-partout” than people use with a wide range of meanings or different connotations. From the point of view of specialised discourse, instead, the term “interculture” takes on multiple meanings. Personally, I understand this term as a methodology, an applicational field, an operational strategy which concerns everyday problems arising from living together and being citizens, a welcome answer to the ongoing global transformations, an observation point, a horizon, a moral instrument. More radically, I tend to consider interculture as a critical mode of dialogical thinking, as a philosophy of the “we”, of open-mindedness, of negotiation, of relation, of hospitality. It can be

read as the need to question ourselves, to understand, to be able to know how to behave in our encounters with the Other, the need to abandon our safe cultural haven and the strongholds that protect our identity, our ways of representing and stigmatising other cultures. It is the need to leave aside our feelings of belonging and of superiority in the name of which, throughout history, we have been denying the newcomers their rights. Within such a purview, intercultural is a tool that can open the doors to multiple ways of thinking, a plurality of philosophies, the general praxes of collective life; this tool is particularly useful in those multi-ethnic urban realities, where operators require innovative theoretical, methodological and practical instruments to deal with the situations arising from migration, education and communication.

Outcomes (expected)

The paper sets out to explore the notion of intercultural pedagogy as a fundamental need for contemporary society. First, it will offer a historical and theoretical overview of the concepts of intercultural, multicultural and transculture; it will investigate the structural characteristics of this new pedagogical concept with the aim to identify the most adequate aims and strategies to achieve not an abstract but a historically determined (here and now), humanity. where every subject can increasingly become an individual and every individual a person]. Only thus, can intercultural pedagogy avoid the risk– quite frequent in the pedagogical debate, of being reduced to an empty, purely ethical and descriptive theorization or to a repertoire of good sentiments and practices. School is the leading institution charged with the rather difficult task of promoting an “education of the mind”, able to combine the “near” and the “far”, the “Particular” and the “Universal”, to defend intellectual freedom, to oppose uniformity and dependency, to contribute to a common project as a result of which old and new forms of intolerance, discrimination, separation and exclusion can be overcome.

However, many have pointed out how school cannot bear such a serious burden alone. Therefore, it requires the help of other historical and international educational subjects, such as the family, the Church, various associations and new and old media. This is the pedagogy of the integrated educational system, which has taken hold in Italy in the last decades. This system postulates a pedagogical pact among different educational subjects, and represents one of the most innovative frontiers of the contemporary pedagogical debate.

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