Intercultural Education and Democracy

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As this is a special issue on intercultural education in a journal about education for democracy, it is important to establish the connections between interculturality and democracy, as well as the role of education in the development of both.

This issue has turned out especially rich in both senses. We have brought together eight articles which fall into two main groups. The first of these groups concerns indigenous Latin Americans: in one case those of Bolivia, in another those of Chiapas, Mexico. The other group, which is the larger of the two, concerns curriculum for intercultural citizenship education. The vast majority of the latter are situated in the United States and Canada; two of them represent curricular interventions.

One piece which is not situated in either of the two groups is that of M. Fernanda Astiz. This is an essay dedicated to critical reflection on the text of the call for papers that was made for this issue.

The first two pieces are clear expositions of how our ingrained western comprehension of concepts such as citizenship, democracy and even interculturality, are challenged by the vision of these same concepts – and of the relationships between them – offered by indigenous populations, when these populations are empowered to, in one case, exercise power and in the other to design a curriculum that corresponds to their culture.

Luis Enrique López presents the case of Bolivia, a country where what we usually refer to as minorities, in this case indigenous populations, actually make up the majority of the population, but have been historically subjugated in spite of that fact. Now, however, with the rise to power of an indigenous party and an indigenous president, the question regarding citizenship has arisen from a very distinct perspective from that of the traditional liberal one, which usually has been understood as constituting traditional democracies. There is a shift, as López himself indicates, "from the denied Indian, to the permitted Indian, and now to the leading Indian", giving way to the most important political transformation since 1825, in which indigenous organizations have moved from virtual invisibility to the place of political actors of the first order. Since the 1980s, along with the return to democracy in Bolivia, the right to cultural difference began to emerge. Now, for understandable reasons, the "distinct" indigenous culture, historically subjugated, has sought to prevail over, even subjugate in turn, the criollo-mestizo culture of western origin.

The close relationship between democracy and interculturality is evident in present day Bolivia. López states that "it is virtually impossible to separate interculturality from citizenship, as its exercise assumes the ongoing negotiation of indigenous involvement in a growing number of social and political spaces."

For indigenous Bolivians, interculturality presumes access to power. For this reason, interculturality in Bolivia is contentious. It faces resistance from a criollo-mestizo population which is not willing to surrender positions of power and profit; it is also secondarily contentious because of the different representative tendencies of indigenous groups who have diverse visions for the country and their active participation in the development of it. For indigenous people, interculturality is part of the process of decolonization of the nation, which is why they defend plurinationalism, including the critical issue of land (something that the criollos-mestizos reject). Citizenship for indigenous people is not only individual, but collective. They challenge, therefore, the liberal civic vision with that of communitarian citizenship, which is based on the appropriation of one's own culture as a political resource.

But interculturality as a policy plays an important part in explaining the current possibility of establishing plurinational citizenship. In Boliva, interculturality as a policy of the State, dates back to 1982. During more than two decades of existence, this policy has achieved, among other things, an increase in the level of awareness about the indigenous population as well as legal recognition of them. Civil society, with its distinct vision of interculturality—one more centered on the enforcement of indigenous rights—also played a role during this time period.

The mestizo sector continues to view interculturality as tolerance, as primarily educational, and as an approach which helps to prevent cultural conflicts. Now, however, the indigenous notion of interculturality is gaining force, understood as access to power, as a means for social reconstruction, as coming into one's own—and and intra and interculturality are seen as complementary notions. It is in this sense that bilingualism gets practiced and acquires meaning.

This leaves the question which López raises: Is it possible to create a truly intercultural citizenship, with emphasis on the cohesion and coexistence among all peoples and countries, or better yet, the consolidation of differentiated ethnic citizenships? As López notes, to a great extent the future of indigenous populations in Latin America is dependent on what happens in Bolivia. And given the relationship between interculturality and democracy, we must wonder: Are more essentialist stances limiting the possibilities for strengthening democracy?

María Bertely Busquets, for her part, also speaks of a historically subjugated indigenous group, in this case in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. This group decides to take education into its own hands and give it an intercultural focus, beginning with the definition of intercultural citizenship education. The indigenous population of Mexico has been subjected to the notion of liberal citizenship, based in formal equality under the law. Such formal equality does not permit difference, and it is in contrast to a communitarian democracy that has survived two centuries of homogenizing policy under national Independence, and which is practiced daily in indigenous communities in the resolution of internal conflicts. The perspective of the author is also contentious, and it is from this perspective, one that is adopted by the educators of the indigenous organization of which she writes, that she proposes "a model of active and solidary citizenship which is able to contribute to the creation of a fuller democratic life." The emphasis is placed on indigenous rights and on indigenous communities as subjects of law – a concept that is rejected by the legislators of the country. The organization under study confronts the challenge of designing a program of intercultural bilingual education based on self-government,
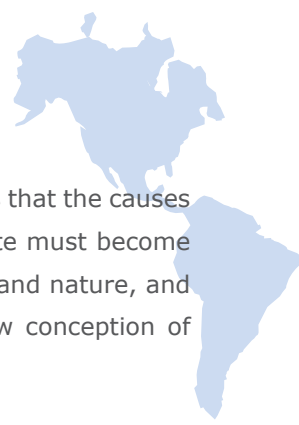
territorial rootedness, and active community participation. This type of education presupposes that the causes of historical conflict between indigenous communities and the hegemonic project of the State must become known. It presupposes a preparation for social life, for achieving a balance between society and nature, and for "living well" (*buen vivir*). It imagines indigenous communities offering the world a new conception of citizenship and democracy which is active, unified, participatory, *bottom-up*.

Bertley narrates a thoughtful inductive process of inter-learning (*interaprendizaje*) and the co-production of an intercultural curriculum by and for indigenous communities. This intercultural co-reflection and coproduction is guided by a principle which states that societies are distinct, and therefore democracies are as well. In all societies, the intention of democracy is to solidify the social fabric, to move toward greater justice. In indigenous societies this is translated into a democracy which, among other things, seeks to control self-interested power (*controlar el poder egoista*), and favors reciprocity in order to strengthen solidarity, active participation on the part of everyone, sustainable equilibrium, and community authority which responds to a mandate of the people. As a consequence of this inductive, intercultural exercise, a form of *alternative citizenship* emerges from below, and it is proposed as a value to be defended and to be given to the world from the perspective of *democracies,* plurally conceived.

In her piece, M. Fernanda Astiz is critical of the fact that in the call for papers for this issue, in speaking of "authentic democracy" we implied that we envisioned democracy as univocal, as if it were one thing only and not historically varied and determined. Astiz correctly notes that every democracy emerges from struggles and negotiations, from ideological clashes and contradictory values. But as our readers will note, the authors of the articles contained here understand, as do we, the notion of "authentic democracy" as an abstract concept which encompasses many democracies. This issue of the journal is, indeed, a mother lode of arguments for a pluralist conception of democracies. The articles by López and Bertely in particular, are clear in showing how the emergence of subjugated democracies has the ability to challenge established notions of democracy and citizenship. But authentic *democracies* – now articulated in the plural form, in response to the criticism – are those which transcend the merely procedural in order to arrive at the profound, those which recognize that democracy implies listening to the other, and to others, especially to those who do not benefit from the status quo, so that democratic progress actually leads to greater justice. The notion of justice includes a respect for different forms of democracy. What we have as a result of this issue is, precisely, evidence of this necessity to speak of *democracies* in the plural, understood as culturally and contextually situated, defined by their history, and dynamic and contentious in their processes, leading to great respect of the other, and to others, and to greater equity and justice.

In the other group of articles are theoretical and methodological contributions which also enrich the notion of citizenship and interculturality, and which shed new light on intercultural educational processes in multicultural contexts. All of these articles are located or have as a reference Canada or the United States, and they equally problematize the education which minorities receive in order to develop intercultural citizenship, along with that which the majority receive in order to accept and respect diversity. Of concern to the authors are the African-American, Hispanic, and Cambodian populations, the final one of these being considered "undesirable Asians." Also of interest are the methods being used to educate the general population in how to live in increasingly diverse societies.

Astiz notes, in her critical essay, that the population of America has always been diverse. She points out that in stating that our societies are becoming progressively more diverse, our call for manuscripts appears to assume that there was previously less diversity. Although Astiz is right in noting that the population of America has always been more diverse than others, there are two phenomena which make diversity a key issue today in every discussion or publication such as this one, that interrogate interculturality and democracy. The first phenomenon is that diversity is no longer primarily coexistence (*coexistencia*) but has become, rather, conviviality (*convivencia*), and this has not brought about a growth in diversity itself, but it has increased the *visibility* of diversity. As we well know, this growing visibility is due both to the media, which gives us knowledge of the other, but especially to migration, that fruit of neoliberal models which make life unsustainable in many areas of the planet, and certainly in our own countries. The other reason for this increased visibility of difference has to do with the self-acceptance of such difference on the part of social groups who previously refused to acknowledge it. Such is the case of women, persons of different sexual orientation, those with disabilities, as well as those belonging to ethnic minorities or who speak minority languages. Now their presence in our societies is much more active than before; people who belong to minority groups, and minority groups themselves, are much more assertive in their presence and much more aware of their rights.

This conviviality, much more diverse than before, to be sure, leads us to share spaces, processes, and eventually perhaps, projects and aspirations. But until that occurs, this diversity is no less contentious. Consequently intercultural education has become a political priority for a great number of nation-states, faced with the conflicts that result from this conviviality between those who have different visions of the world and life, and who pose different solutions to common problems. This was the reference we wished to make in the call for manuscripts, and the contents of the articles received have demonstrated that this was how it was indeed understood by the authors.

The articles that address the issue of curriculum for intercultural citizen education contain many interesting aspects. Joan G. DeJaeghere introduces the concept of "critical citizenship," and proposes a curriculum for use in schools which aims to awaken in students a commitment to the democratic goals of justice and equity. This article traces various types of citizenship education, from the normative, with an emphasis on equality rather than differences, centered on content and endeavoring to create a "good citizen" – a type which is certainly predominant in current curricula – to a more critical citizenship education. This final type is participatory, intimately linked to real life and its institutions, multicultural in its approach, and oriented to *praxis*. DeJaeghere argues that critical citizenship education should be reflected in the curriculum. In order for this to be developed, four pedagogical approaches are proposed: inclusion of the voices of the marginalized in the curriculum, assumption of the other's perspective, development of intercultural understanding and competence, and involvement in collective social action. Some examples of using counternarratives as a didactic strategy in the critical formation of indigenous students in Australia and Peru are included, and the author suggests that critical citizenship education, through utilizing these pedagogical approaches, is the way to develop awareness, commitment, and multiculturalism.

Mehrunnisa A. Ali, meanwhile, performs a critical analysis of the social studies curriculum in the province of Ontario, Canada, and juxtaposes it with the reality of identity for second and third generation ethnic minority
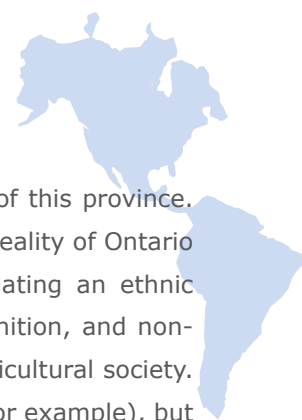
students from migrant families, in three schools located in underprivileged neighborhoods of this province. She finds that there is dissociation between the nationalist curriculum and the multicultural reality of Ontario schools, where students manifest dynamic identities, not binary ones, capable of articulating an ethnic consciousness with a national and a global one. These identities do not have a single definition, and non-stereotypical treatment would allow the natural development of complex identities in a multicultural society. These students offer strong criticisms of Canadian society (such as insecurity and violence, for example), but it is notable that all of them have high regard for Canadian multiculturalism and tolerance. The criticism itself, as well as the recognition of what is valuable, is yet another dimension of the complexity which is possible in the intercultural citizenship education of diverse students situated in multicultural realities.

The article by Judith K. Bernhard, Lisa Evans, Yohannys Marmolejo and Teresa Cosentino presents the analysis of an educational intervention which had the objective of transferring the voluntary work experience of Canadian teachers in impoverished areas of the Dominican Republic to the Canadian classroom, with the goal of creating interculturality. The teachers shared with their Canadian students the writings of Dominican children. The objective of this activity was to dismantle stereotypes, among them the classic image portrayed to Canadians by the media of a Third World that is helpless, and replace it, through studying the writings of Dominican children, with a vision that these people, although poor, are intelligent, concerned, and active--with problems, yes, but also with plans and dreams. This exercise also allows for a change in the self-image and perceptions of migrant children in Canada who have come from these contexts. The act of narration and authorship acquired a leading role in this experience, and their use had an impact on the sense of personal worth and cultural identity. The structural treatment of the problem of poverty also helped to override those explanations of it which attribute the problem to lack of competence or personal effort.

Although the intervention failed to fully achieve its objectives, especially in regard to transforming stereotypes and generating criticism of the assumptions of cultural superiority of Canadian children, in some cases it did help to refine the knowledge of what people are like and how they live in other parts of the world, as well as to initiate attitudinal changes, transforming contempt and pity into appreciation and camaraderie. The results, although modest, reinforce the theoretical and methodological postulates that led to this interesting intervention.

Ellen Skilton-Sylvester conducted three case studies of Cambodian sisters in the United States, seeking to reconstruct how their education in the United States in a broad sense had prepared them for life in a democracy. This education came not only or even mainly from school, but from the harsh reality of their racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic experiences, in a society in which Cambodians are considered "undesirable Asians." Highlighted here is the importance of feeling accepted (*cared for*), of feeling part of something and being recognized--categories which do not necessarily form part of the curriculum of education for democracy. The key question in defining citizenship in the receiving country is if the individual matters to the society, and in a more concrete sense, to whom does she matter – referring to relationships and their quality. The feeling of not belonging comes from the perception of human disconnection. Relationships with teachers are critical; care is not enough, what is required is to feel important to someone (*care for* and *care about*). The Cambodians in the United States miss being recognized for what they are; they are sometimes confused with blacks and Chinese, or even come to feel invisible. The author concludes that it is not about meeting needs, but recognizing rights.

And this is the focus that education for citizenship and democracy should have.

Finally, Edward J. Brantmeier carried out action research in a multicultural school in the United States, which was characterized by racist relations among peers. He developed a curriculum "for international peace" (understanding this as virtually synonymous with intercultural education) against racism, with the objective of putting to the test his ability to produce changes in the students (both the minority and the majority) and in the seven teachers who voluntarily participated. The curriculum includes three broad areas of inquiry: the reconstruction of an understanding of what peace does and does not mean in daily life, intercultural peace building, and the school culture and educational policy. Brantmeier provides a theoretical basis for each aspect of the curriculum, and like Bernhard, et al., he encounters results which he describes as "modest": although the process raised everyone's awareness of diversity, as well as self-esteem and participation among minorities, and commitment among the teachers, it failed to eliminate racism. This aim is complex, and requires a long-term educational project and the involvement of the entire school.

As can be seen, then, this issue is rich in theoretical insights, - among others the concept of critical citizenship, the complex view of identity, the notion of multiple ways of conducting intercultural education (for example, education for international peace, and openly anti-racist education), are ideas which should be examined further . Of great importance is transcending the notion of "needs," and the resulting attention to it, with that of "rights," and its necessary enforcement. This issue is especially rich in methodological approaches: of interlearning; the resources of narratives and counternarratives; the introduction of the notion of *care* in the curriculum, not just as care but also as the concern for the different other; of the conceptions of belonging and recognition as necessary elements of the curriculum; of everyday life as an educator and the need for the curriculum to incorporate it daily as well; of education for the perception of structural problems. The process, as the two articles which analyze direct interventions point out to us, is neither simple nor quick. The results at a glance are always incomplete, and modest. Curricular interventions in intercultural education are long-term projects and require the commitment of the entire school.

After reading this issue, we remain convinced that diversity, recognized and empowered, expresses, in turn, the diversity and complexity of knowledge systems and utopías, as well as conflicts and processes. These different ways of understanding the world and its evolution strongly question established conceptions of interculturality, democracy, citizenship, as well as the education necessary for developing them. As Astiz clearly argues, these ideas are explained historically, are found culturally and contextually situated, and are complex and conflicting. Their presence in the broader debate allows diverse theoretical approaches and methodological developments. We end up referring to these concepts in the plural, but at the same time we recognize the ability of each one to enrich specific processes.

A close relationship exists between interculturality(ies) and democracy(ies). In the development process of each one individually, and of their connections, education, and specifically education for interculturality, citizenship, and democracy, understood equally in the plural as inthe broadest sense, continues to represent a uniquely important route.