



Interculturality and the humanism of diversity: didactic foundations for sustainable education

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À une époque marquée par l'intensification de la mobilité humaine, la question de l'interculturalité a pris une importance renouvelée dans le domaine de l'éducation. Les systèmes éducatifs sont désormais confrontés à des populations de plus en plus hétérogènes, caractérisées par la diversité des langues, des références culturelles, des trajectoires sociales et des relations au savoir. Dans ce contexte, l'éducation interculturelle ne peut être réduite à la transmission de connaissances descriptives sur « l'autre » ou à une simple pédagogie de la tolérance. Cela implique plutôt la construction d'une vision du monde fondée sur la reconnaissance de la diversité, la réflexivité critique et la co-construction du sens dans un cadre éthique partagé. L'objectif de cet article est de démontrer que l'interculturalité constitue moins un champ d'enseignement spécifique qu'un cadre de pensée transversal, capable de transformer en profondeur les finalités de l'éducation et les pratiques pédagogiques.

Mots-clés : interculturalité, épistémologie, didactique, durabilité, éducation.

In an era marked by the intensification of human mobility, the issue of interculturality has gained renewed prominence in the field of education. Educational systems are now confronted with increasingly heterogeneous populations, characterized by diverse languages, cultural references, social trajectories, and relationships to knowledge. In this context, intercultural education cannot be reduced to the transmission of descriptive knowledge about "the other" or to a mere pedagogy of tolerance. Rather, it entails the construction of a worldview grounded in the recognition of diversity, critical reflexivity, and the co-construction of meaning within a shared ethical framework. The objective of this article is to demonstrate that interculturality constitutes less a specific field of instruction than a transversal framework of thought, capable of profoundly transforming the aims of education and pedagogical practices.

Keywords: interculturality, epistemology, didactics, sustainability, education.

En una época marcada por la intensificación de la movilidad humana, el tema de la interculturalidad ha adquirido un nuevo protagonismo en el campo de la educación. Los sistemas educativos se enfrentan actualmente a poblaciones cada vez más heterogéneas, caracterizadas por la diversidad de lenguas, referencias culturales, trayectorias sociales y relaciones con el conocimiento. En este contexto, la educación intercultural no puede reducirse a la transmisión de conocimientos descriptivos sobre "el otro" o a una mera pedagogía de la tolerancia. Más bien, implica la construcción de una cosmovisión basada en el reconocimiento de la diversidad, la reflexividad crítica y la co-construcción del significado dentro de un marco ético compartido. El objetivo de este artículo es demostrar que la interculturalidad constituye menos un campo específico de instrucción que un marco transversal de pensamiento, capaz de transformar profundamente los objetivos de la educación y las prácticas pedagógicas.

Palabras clave : interculturalidad, epistemología, didáctica, sostenibilidad, educación.

Introduction

Contemporary societies are characterized by an unprecedented intensification of contacts, exchanges, and interdependencies among individuals, groups, and cultures. International migration - whether voluntary or forced - economic globalization, the accelerated circulation of knowledge and symbolic goods, and the widespread use of digital technologies have profoundly transformed traditional frameworks of socialization, identification, and cultural transmission. These transformations are accompanied by a reconfiguration of individual and collective identities, often marked by tensions, uncertainties, and forms of identity withdrawal.

In this context, schools and universities occupy a strategic position. They both reflect the social and cultural diversity of contemporary societies and constitute privileged spaces for the construction of social cohesion (Lacroix & Maheu, 2015). Educational institutions therefore face a dual challenge: on the one hand, managing the growing diversity of school and university populations; on the other, educating citizens capable of understanding the plurality of social worlds (Tidiane-Wane & Cordier, 2021), engaging in dialogue with otherness, and actively participating in the construction of democratic, inclusive, and solidaristic societies. Within this context, intercultural education has gradually emerged as a possible response to these challenges. It is now widely present in institutional discourses, teacher education programs, and international educational policies (Rautenberg, 2008). However, its implementation often remains marked by conceptual ambiguities and practical reductions. Too frequently, interculturality is equated with a simple juxtaposition of cultures, a folkloric celebration of diversity, or a minimal pedagogy of tolerance focused on the peaceful coexistence of differences, without any genuine questioning of power relations and structural inequalities.

Yet, educating for interculturality requires a deeper transformation of cognitive frameworks, relationships to knowledge, and pedagogical practices (Abid-Zarrouk & Emmanuel, 2022). It is not merely a matter of adding intercultural content to existing curricula, but of rethinking the very purposes of education in a plural world. From this perspective, interculturality appears as a comprehensive educational project, involving epistemological, ethical, and political reflection (Guegnard, 2006).

This article adopts a critical and humanistic perspective. It argues that intercultural education should be conceived as a vehicle for a *humanism of diversity*, understood as a non-hegemonic humanism capable of recognizing the plurality of cultures, knowledge systems, and forms of rationality, while affirming the universality of fundamental values such as human dignity, social justice, and solidarity. The central research question guiding this reflection is as follows: What are the epistemological foundations of intercultural education oriented toward a humanism of diversity, and how can these foundations be translated into didactic orientations and sustainable educational perspectives?

Epistemological foundations of interculturality

From culture as essence to culture as process

One of the primary epistemological issues of interculturality concerns the very definition of culture. For a long time, the human and social sciences were shaped by a substantialist conception of culture, inherited from classical anthropology. Culture was conceived as a relatively homogeneous

and stable set of values, norms, beliefs, and practices specific to a given group, often associated with a territory, a language, or a shared origin (Chevrier, 2013). This essentialist conception strongly influenced early educational approaches to interculturality, which primarily aimed to promote knowledge of “other cultures” to foster mutual understanding. However, this approach has significant limitations. By reifying cultural identities, it tends to reinforce stereotypes, naturalize differences, and obscure internal dynamics of transformation, conflict, and hybridity.

From the 1970s onward, contemporary approaches - particularly interpretive anthropology (Geertz, 1973), interactionist sociology, and poststructuralist currents - have profoundly renewed the understanding of culture. Culture is now conceived as a dynamic, historical, and relational process (Perrineau, 1975), produced through social interactions and power relations. Rather than a stock of traits to be transmitted, culture is understood as a system of meanings in constant reconfiguration, shaped by tensions, hybridizations, and contradictions.

Educating for interculturality therefore requires a major epistemological shift (Alaoui, 2010). It is no longer a matter of teaching cultures as closed entities, but of developing learners’ capacity to analyze processes of meaning-making, to understand the complexity of identities, and to recognize the situated and contextual nature of all cultural production.

Critique of ethnocentrism and naïve relativism

Intercultural education is situated within a permanent tension between two epistemological pitfalls: ethnocentrism and absolute relativism. Ethnocentrism consists in considering one’s own culture as the implicit norm against which other cultures are evaluated (Guegnard, 2006). It manifests itself in curricula, pedagogical practices, and assessment modes that privilege certain forms of knowledge, language, and rationality to the detriment of others. Conversely, naïve relativism assumes that all cultures are equivalent in every respect and that no critical judgment is possible or legitimate (Étienne, 1999). While seemingly open-minded, such relativism often leads to the neutralization of ethical and political issues, by preventing reflection on human rights, inequalities, or forms of symbolic violence.

A humanism of diversity requires moving beyond this sterile opposition. As Abdallah-Pretceille (1997) emphasizes, interculturality aims neither at the fusion of cultures nor at their hierarchization, but at the construction of a space of mediation grounded in dialogue, mutual recognition, and reflexivity (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1996). It involves acknowledging the plurality of viewpoints without renouncing an ethics of judgment based on universalizable values.

Epistemologically, this posture implies critical decentering, through which learners are invited to question their own cultural assumptions, recognize the partiality of any perspective, and accept uncertainty as a condition of knowledge. Otherness is no longer conceived as an external reality to be understood, but as a constitutive dimension of the subject itself.

The dialogical paradigm and the co-construction of meaning

Interculturality is fundamentally grounded in a dialogical paradigm, as developed by Bakhtin (1984). From this perspective, meaning is never given univocally; it emerges through interaction among subjects carrying different cultural references, languages, and histories. Knowledge is thus conceived as a relational and situated process, inseparable from the social and cultural conditions of its production. In the educational field, this dialogical paradigm challenges transmissive

models of teaching based on a linear and hierarchical conception of knowledge. Educating for interculturality entails recognizing that learners bring with them legitimate knowledge, experiences, and interpretive frameworks capable of enriching the learning process (Clerc & Rispaill, 2008; Meunier, 2008).

This dialogical conception of knowledge invites us to conceive education as a space for the co-construction of meaning, in which sociocognitive conflict, the confrontation of viewpoints, and the negotiation of meanings play a central role. It also presupposes an acceptance of complexity and ambiguity, breaking with logics of simplification and standardization.

Didactic orientations for intercultural education

Didactics of reflexivity

Intercultural education cannot be limited to the acquisition of declarative knowledge about cultures. It must aim at the development of reflexive competencies that enable learners to analyze their representations, prejudices, and frames of reference. Reflexivity, as conceptualized by Schön (1983) and Bourdieu (2001), constitutes a key lever for transforming practices and professional postures. From an intercultural perspective (Blanchet, 2004), reflexivity allows individuals to become aware of the influence of culture on modes of perception, communication, and learning. It involves work on the self, through which subjects learn to situate themselves, recognize their own biases, and question the taken-for-granted assumptions structuring their relationship to the world.

Didactically, this orientation translates into the implementation of learning devices that promote self-analysis and metacognition, such as the analysis of lived or simulated intercultural situations, reflective writing (learning journals, portfolios), and structured debates around ethical dilemmas. These devices enable experience to be transformed into knowledge and foster a lifelong learning posture.

Experiential learning and the encounter with otherness

Interculturality is not taught solely through discourse; it is lived through experience. Experiential approaches (Afnakar, 2020), inspired by Dewey (1938) and Kolb (1984), play a central role in intercultural education. They are based on the idea that learning results from a dynamic interaction between experience, reflection, and action.

Intercultural exchanges, international collaborative projects, internships in multicultural settings, and digitally mediated interactions all provide fertile contexts for intercultural learning. However, exposure to diversity does not automatically guarantee the development of intercultural competencies. Without pedagogical guidance, it may even reinforce stereotypes and misunderstandings. The didactic challenge therefore lies in supporting experience through processes of distancing, analysis, and conceptualization. The teacher acts as a mediator, helping learners make sense of their experiences and derive transferable learning outcomes.

Educating for interculturality also means educating about relations of domination and social and cultural inequalities. Interculturality cannot be dissociated from a critical pedagogy (González-Monteagudo, 2002), as developed by Freire (1974), which aims to raise learners' awareness of the political and ideological dimensions of education.

This critical pedagogy invites reflection on the coloniality of knowledge, linguistic hierarchies, racial and cultural discrimination, and mechanisms of social reproduction. It fosters the development of critical thinking and civic engagement, in opposition to a neutralizing conception of education. From this perspective (Meunier, 2008), interculturality becomes a tool for emancipation, enabling learners to understand their social and cultural positioning and to conceive themselves as agents of social transformation.

Sustainable perspectives and the humanism of diversity

A humanism of diversity is grounded in an ethics of recognition (Honneth, 2000), which implies recognizing the other in their dignity, voice, and knowledge. This recognition goes beyond the formal acceptance of difference; it requires the effective valorization of individual experiences and contributions. Intercultural education thus contributes to the construction of more just and inclusive societies by promoting respect for human rights, combating discrimination, and fostering peace (Pretceille, 2010). It helps shape subjects capable of empathy, responsibility, and solidarity.

Intercultural issues are closely linked to the challenges of sustainable development (Taoudi & Nouri, 2021). Contemporary ecological, health, and social crises reveal the growing interdependence of human societies and the need for collective responses based on cooperation and intercultural dialogue. Educating for interculturality means preparing learners to think about a globalized world marked by the plurality of knowledge systems and relationships to nature. This implies valuing local knowledge, Southern epistemologies, and plural approaches to development.

Finally, a sustainable perspective on interculturality requires the contextualization of educational practices (Blanchet, 2004). There is no universal model of intercultural education; it must be designed in relation to specific social, historical, and institutional contexts. In countries of the Global South in particular, interculturality can serve as a lever for valuing local languages and cultures while fostering openness to the world.

Conclusion

Educating for interculturality to promote a humanism of diversity cannot be reduced to a pedagogical trend or a simple, punctual curricular adjustment. Rather, it constitutes a profound shift in educational paradigms, involving a re-examination of the very purposes of education, relationships to knowledge, and modes of constructing social cohesion. This educational approach invites us to move beyond the mere transmission of content and to envision schools as spaces of mediation, dialogue, and co-construction of meaning among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. In a contemporary world characterized by cultural plurality, population mobility, identity tensions, and systemic crises—social, economic, and environmental—intercultural education emerges as an essential ethical, cognitive, and political requirement. Ethically, it is grounded in the recognition of the dignity and value of each culture and in the promotion of social justice. Cognitively, it fosters the development of critical, reflexive, and metacognitive competencies that enable learners to grasp the complexity of human interactions and to nuance their perceptions of the world. Politically, it contributes to the formation of citizens capable of engaging in responsible dialogue, negotiating difference, and actively participating in the construction of a more inclusive and democratic society.

Thus, intercultural education is not limited to the acquisition of isolated knowledge or skills; it transforms the way individuals perceive diversity and interact with it. It requires rethought pedagogical and curricular frameworks, reflective teaching practices, and an institutional culture that values openness, empathy, and the co-construction of knowledge. In this sense, educating for interculturality becomes a crucial vector of social resilience and collective cohesion in societies undergoing constant transformation.

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