

PRESENTATION

Cultural Diversity and Socio-Educational Inclusion

In the field of education, the last decade of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century have been characterized by the dynamism and the new configuration of the classroom. Globalization and the speed of social, economic, cultural and technological change make new demands of schools which oblige educational systems to constantly renew themselves in order to respond to the demands and needs of people and societies.

The consequences of globalization are interdependence, interconnections, interrelations and the existence of global networks through which any event or fact in any given place which may previously have only had a local impact, today can have global repercussions. This globalization facilitates exchange between persons from different cultural contexts but, in parallel, it also facilitates exclusion and social segregation. According to UNESCO (2005, 15) *“globalization is presented to us as an opportunity for exchange and enrichment between nations and peoples, but it also introduces new tensions in social coexistence. We have detected the appearance of new forms of intolerance and aggression. On the one hand, we experience the fascinating proximity of many different cultures, but on the other, we see how xenophobia, racism and discrimination based on color, sex or ethnicity increase. Cultural diversity, instead of being seen as the common heritage of*

humanity and an opportunity for growth, becomes a threat and is used as an excuse for intolerance and discrimination”.

The challenge for education and educational systems in the face of this globalization and social change is to maintain a balance between people's right to their own identity and a guarantee of basic learning for all people. According to UNESCO (2007), the response of education to diversity requires a guarantee of the right to one's own identity, respecting every other person for who they are, with their biological, social, cultural and personal characteristics which allow the individualization of a person in society.

The Right to Education (Universal Declaration, Art. 5) does not just mean the right of access to an educational system, the right to education refers to the right to receive a quality education which achieves the optimum development of all pupils, encouraging their active participation in society. From the point of view of cultural diversity, offering a quality education means an education without discrimination of any kind, progressing towards a focus which values, recognizes and encourages cultural diversity in the educational community, promoting full access, progress, educational achievement and the active participation of students, their families and the teaching community, with special attention to those in a situation or at risk of exclusion. To this end, it is essential to take educational measures to address

cultural diversity, such as cross-cultural education for all, to diversify the educational offer, to adapt the curriculum, to adopt stereotype-free texts and images, to establish flexible school calendars, the active participation of all in school life, etc.

Educational systems alone cannot guarantee respect for cultural differences and guarantee equal opportunities, but they can cooperate in the construction of fairer, more solidary societies. In fact, with respect to this point, educational systems are one of the central axes for harmonious cross-cultural coexistence, since they can cultivate among students the cultural skills necessary to forge planetary citizenship.

However, to respond to cultural diversity, educational systems today face three important challenges (UNESCO, 2005):

- Not to fall into cultural homogenization. In the tension generated by encouraging self-esteem and one's own cultural identity and at the same time encouraging the valuing of cultural differences, there is a danger of falling into a process of cultural assimilation and homogenization.
- How to educate persons of different origin, ethnicity and values regarding harmonious coexistence. The danger is that stereotypes and prejudices which are accepted in society are reproduced instead of constructing new models of social coexistence based on democratic principles.
- How the school can promote inclusive education, reducing the inequality of opportunity suffered by some pupils due to their place of origin, culture, economic situation, etc. The school runs the risk of reproducing the social segmentation and exclusion of marginalized groups.

This monograph offers a series of educational innovations which represent a crucial space to provide answers to new challenges and generate new solutions for the needs of today's school, in response to cultural diversity. The paper comprises six sections, some addressing different geographical contexts, which describe the reality of the classroom and demonstrate the need to continue innovating and proposing alternative teaching methodologies in order to configure a fairer society.

The first article analyses the need for social educators in schools in order to enhance the quality of education. Social educators are essential agents in cross-cultural education and the treatment of cultural diversity, and their functions and competencies and what they can contribute to the direction of education for harmonious coexistence and cross-cultural relationships are

considered. This article presents the results of a study performed in several Andalusian schools through which, together with the social educators at the schools, an analysis is made of what their functions are with respect to the treatment of cultural diversity. The article encourages the development of the profession of social educator in the educational system and reflects on the importance of harmonious coexistence at school in order to promote education for citizenship and the construction of a society based on respect and social participation by all.

The second contribution revolves around the inclusion of immigrant pupils in public schools, which is still today one of the challenges facing the educational system. This article defines the measures that schools should take in order to integrate immigrant pupils, promoting equity, cross-cultural harmony and establishing processes to address cultural diversity. In summary, it establishes a series of good practices which schools should implement in order to enhance cross-cultural education in educational contexts involving immigrant pupils.

The third article focuses on the teacher, the methodology used involving technology and the learning of a second language by immigrant pupils. It contemplates a case study in a school in Texas and how, through technological resources, Latino pupils learn a second language while retaining their mother tongue. The teaching method considered could be useful for the training of teachers who face the challenge of teaching a second language.

One of the central axes of this monograph is harmonious cross-cultural coexistence based on democratic citizenship and the fourth article concentrates on this point, analyzing the constitutional values of young Christians and Muslims. This contribution includes the results of a study undertaken in the city of Ceuta among young Christians and Muslims of between 15 and 20 years of age, establishing that educational processes are encouraging the social cohesion of these young people, although differences can be detected in some values derived from Islamic traditions.

The following section presents the perspective of Moroccan pupils in public secondary schools in Andalusia, and how they feel with respect to their own cultural identity. Through quantitative methodology, over 800 surveys are analyzed in order to discover the reality experienced by Moroccan minors with respect to their arrival in Spain, their contact with their homeland, their opinions of their cultural traditions, elements of their current lifestyle and prospects for the future. In this regard, it is important to know how immigrant pupils feel in order to establish intervention strategies in

the schools to benefit their integration at school and in society.

Finally, the sixth article focuses on the relationship between the family and the school as a relevant factor for a quality education and the achievement of academic goals, especially in schools working in contexts of social exclusion. This section presents the results of research undertaken in 24 schools to establish models for collaboration between the family and the school and how the schools which encourage this collaboration obtain better academic results and promote harmonious cross-cultural coexistence.

This monograph aims to guide and serve as a basis for scientific and academic debate that will bring progress towards a model of cross-cultural

education in which cultural diversity is a source of enrichment and human development, encouraging democratic coexistence and social equity. To achieve this, it is not so important in the educational sphere to speak of cross-culturalism as cross-cultural harmony, without forgetting the connection which exists between cultural diversity and social exclusion, since cultural diversity is very often considered to be a problem, masking the fact that the real problem lies in the social exclusion derived from other factors, such as economic, labor or social factors.

We hope that this material helps to improve harmonious cross-cultural coexistence in the school and encourages good practices in the management of cultural diversity in school systems.

Bibliography

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Rocío Cárdenas Rodríguez

Teresa Terrón Caro

Universidad Pablo de Olavide

