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Intercultural Pedagogy as governance of good practices

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Sommario

L'articolo intende proporre la riflessione pedagogica interculturale nei termini di una pedagogia critica che possa assumere il ruolo di coordinamento e governance di "buone pratiche" inclusive che mettano al primo posto percorsi di formazione e di emancipazione, anche, dei soggetti stranieri. In questa chiave si presenterà un progetto dal titolo "L'Aquila oltre confini", promosso dall'Associazione Bibliobus di L'Aquila in partnership con l'Università degli studi di L'Aquila e altre realtà della Regione Abruzzo, fra cui la sezione Arci-L'Aquila, che ha avuto l'obiettivo di realizzare, nello scorso anno accademico, un programma di partecipazione attiva, inclusione e formazione di rifugiati e richiedenti asilo politico e di formazione interculturale dei bambini e ragazzi di alcuni istituti del capoluogo abruzzese. Il progetto si è articolato in più fasi che hanno visto la "contaminazione" di momenti laboratoriali e momenti seminariali attraverso il canale della narrazione autobiografica e delle storie di vita.

Parole chiave

Emancipazione, pedagogia critica, inclusione

Abstract

This paper aims at rethinking pedagogical intercultural thinking in terms of a critical pedagogy that can also provide co-ordination and governance of inclusive good practices which put in first place training and emancipation programs which include foreign subjects too. "L'Aquila without borders" is a project promoted by L'Aquila association Bibliobus in partnership with the University of L'Aquila and other stakeholders of the Abruzzo region, L'Aquila section of Arci. The project has the aim of creating, in the last academic year, an active program of participation, inclusion and education of refugees and asylum seekers and intercultural education of children of some institutions in the capital of Abruzzo. The project was divided into several stages and featured the "contamination" of workshops and seminars via the channels of self-narrative and life stories.

Keywords

Empowerment, critical pedagogy, inclusion

Fear causes us to reject the other and history has shown that rejection, deportations and radical exclusions breed destabilization and violence [...].

We must contribute to educate people all over the world to sow and breed a culture of intercultural dialogue [...]. [1]

(Freire, 2011, p. 191, translated)

As N. Luhmann (Luhmann, Schorr, 1988) pointed out, once global society completed the functional diversification process, which led every system to acquire a fully different identity and a total autonomy from other systems and from the surrounding social environment as well, we can no longer regard each social system as a single, independent unit. This is because when a system loses its traditional organisational structure it also loses its consistency and unity. This happened also to intercultural pedagogy that must perceive, consolidate and stimulate relationships with other social systems through new reflections on training and education activities, including those involving refugees or asylum seekers.

Without this momentous, non-delayable emancipation process we would build an idea of world and society based on the paradigm of "reception" and "hospitality" but fully unable to use either to overcome of the key role played by differences and diversities. Our society would be one which cannot turn differences into dialectical strategies. We have to explore our intercultural "zone of proximal development", to put it in Vygotsky's words, in order to deconstruct and compare our core concepts and finally acknowledge our real, inherent diversity. This is a creative process that shall involve both symbolic and material products. Education, in the words of Marco Catarci (Catarci, 2011, pp. 55-83; Catarci, Fiorucci, 2015), is therefore a valid means of action for two reasons in particular: first of all because it activates an individual's personal resources and then because it can guarantee to adult subjects a "custom tailored" growth path that bonds with the skills, abilities, competences and knowledge everyone has and enhances them.

In other words, our pedagogical outlook is based neither on the pursuit of a common cultural denominator that dilutes individual creativity and originality nor on the acceptance of a relativism which reduces the complexity of the rights and opportunities of the refugees to the mere satisfaction of basic needs; rather, it is the transposition of human dignity in everyday life through three dimensions: the moral dimension (responsibility to oneself and the others) the social dimension (which includes education) and the ontological dimension - that is part of the macro world of identity that remains itself while transforming continuously (Sayad, 2002; Aime, 2004).

EU's inclusion strategies, so far, have been basically economic in nature, to the point they in some cases produced the iatrogenic effect of subjugation, or even "domestication". Instead we must go back to support the cultural-educational approach to create a physical and mental "space" of sharing and participation.

As Levi Strauss (Levi Strauss, 1967) said, a journey unravels simultaneously in space, in time and in the social hierarchy. By that he meant that a distant place is not only strange and exotic, but it also evokes a time other than the one we live in, a flowing of time that materialises through different social formations. A journey is not just a movement from a place to another but rather a complex and complete experience both on an individual level and for what concerns the many facets of life and environments reached during it; in this sense, a traveller is "an archaeologist of space and time", as the journey dives into the maze of the traveller's own culture as well as other cultures. Therefore, since a journey is always a discovery, it also represents an opportunity to accumulate and store away experiences, both individual and collective. And as this process goes on, the cultures the traveller "visited" gradually settle in and take root in his/her mind and background.

In order to stimulate and intensify these exchanges and this accumulation of learning the research on intercultural education and training may take several different approaches:

- The need to document in an accessible manner the development of studies and best practices, gathering and sharing materials and documents which could provide support and knowledge;
- The need to bring educational research and practice as close as possible. Intercultural education can be one of the "places of choice" to connect theory and practice in a consistent structure;
- The need to encourage more new experiments and collaborations. The concept of networking is the basis of a serious and open approach to education.

This is the *focus* of intercultural pedagogy rethought with a critical pedagogy approach. This approach attempts to go beyond the prevailing considerations of social and educational organizations, reviving the unbreakable bond that holds together pedagogy and politics. McLaren (McLaren, Kincheloe, 2007) claims that it is impossible to strip pedagogy of its relationship with politics and indeed that trying to do so would be dishonest.

Critical pedagogy in the strict sense emerges at the end of the 1970s in the United States and its leading figures are Giroux, McLaren, Aronowitz and Peter. One of the many elements shared by these thinkers is the reference to the figure of Paulo Freire and some of his reflections: anti-authority pedagogical world view, approach to dialogue, the primacy of practical experience and the very concept of emancipation.

Critical pedagogy also is defined by its crucial theoretical-practical commitment to political, social and economic analysis of the education system and of its possible transformations geared towards social justice, recognising minority rights, focus on marginalisation, differences and emancipation of the individual, which is the key figure of each pedagogical project (Cambi, 2009).

If we remain focussed only on the social facet of the issue, migrants will eventually be absorbed by the social services and welfare system and risk being subjugated, i.e. turned into a fully passive part of society. On the contrary, refugees can and should be given the chance to become a force of change and inclusion, a force that will help to gradually transform our multicultural society in a truly intercultural one.

Intercultural pedagogy has been identified as one of the six Pillars of the New Europe (Council of Europe, 2008) but it struggles to be recognised as a truly transversal research and development area. From this point of view intercultural pedagogy really might take a *governance* role: focus on coordination, collection, consolidation and connection of procedures, strategies, studies, trials, thoughts.

This would allow us to pursue and fulfil the hopes voiced in the *Rapport of Secrétaire Général des Nations Unies sur les Migrations et le développement internationaux dans la perspective du Dialogue de haut niveau de 2006* (Council of Europe, 2009) which acknowledged that in those very days Europe and the world were beginning to learn how to turn migrations into a tool for societal development in the face of their well documented inability to build a clear, consistent framework, an ethical and educational analysis perspective. Can intercultural pedagogy play this role? Yes, exactly thanks to its transversal status.

2. The critical vocabulary of inclusion

Education, as a whole, is regarded as a powerful deterrent to the risk of social exclusion and as a tool to promote active participation and raise awareness. Despite that, social inclusion's own vocabulary is plagued by some ambiguities:

1. a) "Including", that is, "not leaving out", "out" from what?
2. b) Who shall be included? with what subjectivity?
3. c) Should we include also those who do not want to be included?
4. d) Who decides to include?

In this respect it bears mentioning Michel Foucault's critical reflections on arrogance, normalisation, standardisation and his systematic unmasking, disassembling and deconstruction of the traditional idea of power and control started with his *Microphysics of power*. The first proposal is that the term "inclusion" shall be regarded referring to a human attitude rather than to a given activity or practice (institutionalised or otherwise). Educational and social practice begins this way: the educator or the education community respond to the demands of a subject, or in general to a need that becomes "evident" and in doing so applies and refers to specific standards, frameworks of sense and meaning, models of Good shared by the civil society, the institutions, the production and education world. This is how the need to be taken care of emerges.

In order to understand this anthropological perspective it is necessary to avoid underestimating two "preliminary" issues:

- First of all we cannot be sure that a human being is "socially included" or not only because we provided him/her with a job or because we have introduced him/her in a social environment that the society itself regards as "less marginalised" compared to others. Indeed that being could still remain "excluded" if he/she has not activated other dimensions (regarded as less important compared to other, more pressing and more "basic" needs) that might cause him/her to become excluded again. Z. Bauman's works, for example, extensively researches and describes the problems of our present-day world, the *Loneliness of the global citizen* (Bauman, 2000).

The strongest, most influential points of reference for this issue are the (converging) thoughts M. Nussbaum and A. Sen on "capabilities building" as opposed to improving living conditions; an individual who is helped to develop and reinforce his skills and abilities lives better than one who simply receives assistance and support to meet his/her needs. Martha Nussbaum's interest on the skill building approach (borrowed from the works of Amartya Sen whom she further expanded on) stems both from her involvement in researches on human development and from her participation to skill-building and empowerment programmes for women in developing countries. Her *capability approach* blends different experiences: her Aristotelian background, her works on the human development indicators and her interaction with severely impoverished but at the same time rich with the drive to change environments in India and in other developing countries. For these reasons Nussbaum, unlike Sen, focuses more on public policies, recognising their potential to favour conditions that allow capabilities to grow and become practice and operational skills and, at the same time, their potential to actively counter and disable all the mechanisms that hamper growth. She also directed her approach to the building of a theory of basic, core social justice and to introduce new concepts like minimum threshold. However, both Nussbaum and Sen agree to promote this approach as the basis of a normative theory of human welfare that is the foundation of a new concept of human development and of new strategies for international development (See Nussbaum, 2014).

- It is also necessary to address the issue of the rhetoric use of the Social Inclusion vocabulary and of the likelihood that the same vocabulary may be interpreted through the register of absorption and social homologation. Is "including" diversity an attempt to "normalize", "homologate" it, making people become like us and leading them to live according to our categories? Do we include to better control the other, or out of guilt or narcissism?

If we take into account that, then when we talk about "inclusion" we shall keep in mind critical issues, positive aspects, assumptions and perspectives. S. Zizek and G. Agamben, for example, harshly judge the rhetoric slant of inclusion made in the name of "human rights", and strongly assert that no true, meaningful recognition can occur until the human rights become civil and political rights as well (Zizek, 2005).

A critical approach to "inclusion" as a word and as a concept is one that regards recognition, acceptance of every human being as a whole and with all of the human dimensions (social, civil, political, professional, familiar, religious and existential but also the dimensions of community, love and friendship and the dimension of the body) that is implemented through a prejudice-free attitude, predisposition and *mindset* the educator and the community can take.

Citizenship stops being just a legal status and a condition of equal rights and liberties imposed from above and becomes an "action" and active participation.

3. "L'Aquila oltre i confini" (L'Aquila beyond borders): report of a shared project

This part of the paper will briefly introduce the principles, the ideas, the construction, the methods and the results of a shared work, inspired by this view of social inclusion.

"L'Aquila oltre i confini" is a project which generated also a book, *Educare oltre i confini. Storie narrazioni interculturali* (Nanni, 2015). The project featured a partnership with the University of L'Aquila, the Department of Human Sciences (Education area) and several associations: Bibliobus (the leading association), Arci-L'Aquila (with the project SPRAR), Koinonia and the "Ricostruire Insieme" (*Rebuilding together*) committee, all operating in L'Aquila, the regional capital of Abruzzo. The project's experience comes from the desire to design, share and experience a process of implementation of education programs, awareness campaigns and information on the so-called active and participative citizenship, on the prevention and overcoming of all forms of discrimination and intolerance via the use of participatory methodologies contextualized within the contexts of education (schooling, higher education and adult education) and the voluntary sector.

The project was divided into several stages which saw the "contamination" of workshops with seminars, technical analyses, methodologies and reflections. The cornerstones of the project are the autobiographical narratives and life stories that have been a core component of the workshops and of the meetings through which the project's year-long (2014-2015) path developed and came to completion and to the intercultural dialogue, strongly linked to the educational, cultural and relational needs of the young men and women participating to the SPRAR (Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati, *Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees*) managed by the ARCI - L'Aquila Territorial Committee.

Children, associations, teachers, educators, asylum seekers, refugees, teachers, students and experts exchanged knowledge and skills in order to continuously formulate and re-formulate a project designed to be potentially reproducible; all of this project was indeed designed and planned to be implemented not just in the L'Aquila territory but also "elsewhere": in other words the project could work as an inspiration and incentive for all who want to develop a project aimed at furthering coexistence and participation.

As the project coordinator Anna Lisa D'Antonio said (Nanni, 2015, p. 51-58), the leading association Bibliobus started its main activity of "travelling library" in the tent camps set up in the aftermath of the April 6, 2009 earthquake that devastated the city of L'Aquila. Thanks to the donations and support of many people when the tent camps were dismantled the project, instead of ending, evolved further by building the Bibliocasa, a permanent structure that is at the same time a library and a meeting point.

The same view of helping socialisation and aggregation and socialization of the denizens of L'Aquila, forced into isolation and fragmentation by the city's devastation led Bibliobus, in partnership with other organizations, to promote the project "L'Aquila oltre i confini", funded by the Volunteer Work Overseeing Office of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (funding authorised pursuant to Law no. 266/91, 2013 Guidelines).

The project, which aims at promoting active citizenship initiatives to reduce discrimination and at encouraging the creation of shared paths leading to a greater awareness of the richness of diversity, by implementing five measures:

1. **Gioco di storie storie di gioco** - (*A game of stories*) a series of workshops for the final classes (IV and V) of some of the primary schools in L'Aquila, that prompt pupils to start their own journeys into mutual acknowledgment and appreciation of all different cultures, with the priceless contribution and help of the young refugees hosted in L'Aquila.
2. **Lettere multilingue** - (*Multi-lingual reading*) reading aloud of fairy tales to adults, especially parents of Italian and foreign children of the classes involved in the previous measure, but also university students, teachers and simple Italian and foreign citizens living in L'Aquila.
3. **Storie migranti** - (*Migrant stories*) a study and research seminar on the immigration and inclusion dynamics and processes for Italian and foreign students of the L'Aquila University and representatives of foreign communities living in L'Aquila. The SPRAR project boys contributed to the seminar with their very own life stories and experiences, thus demonstrating the meaning of "telling about yourself" as a maieutics of identity and giving living proof of the importance of narration as a means to recover one's history and as a means of sharing.
4. **Tecniche di contaminazione** (*Contamination techniques*) a workshop for University students and foreign young people that are already part of

the project. This workshop uses games as a method to further examine narration-based inclusion and integration methods. To further demonstrate how self-narration is complex but essential in the process of individual and collective analysis, project participants were then invited to get involved personally by telling a small part of themselves and then various excerpts from those narratives were knitted together in a unique story about the entire group. The result is a tale "out of time and space" where what mattered most was not the country of origin or the language but the desire of being listened to and the wish to be "contaminated" by the story of the other in a cross-cultural work.

5. **Migrando: le culture varcano i confini** (*Migrating: cultures cross borders*) - review of events (meetings with young Italian and foreign writers, workshops for students, presentations of literary works open to all citizens, conferences on migrations and integration, games-based activities and multi-lingual readings) of a social and cultural nature aimed at increasing knowledge of the different cultures in the L'Aquila area.

All involved subjects have participated proactively in activity planning workgroups and even changing the activities' operational modalities basing on changes in needs surfaced during working.

The project goals have prompted participants to develop, from the very beginning, operational protocols and procedures with a clear, shared goal: bringing the concepts of diversity, meeting, and communication to the surface and under the spotlight. To this end, it became clear that the narrative, the creation of stories, was one of the tools for highlighting both the features different cultures shared and those that set them apart.

The added value of the project "L'Aquila beyond borders" lies probably in its being replicable in all the different contexts where migration is growing and where, for social and cultural reasons, it is particularly necessary to adopt a structured, multi-level reception and integration process. If it is true that mutual understanding is key to bridge gaps, experience has shown that this distance can be reduced also through a multi-level education action involving schools, universities and adult education in the broadest sense.

The project also confirmed that it is essential to build up a network with the social sector stakeholders who focus on improving knowledge and valorisation of the different cultures in the area. Only then it will become possible to create truly integrated communities that can act as the root of strong social and cultural changes, and not just at local level.

4. Refugees and asylum seekers in Abruzzo (Italy)

Andrea Salomone, head of the Arci L'Aquila Area Committee and the SPRAR project, in his book *Educare oltre confini* stated that refugees and asylum seekers in Abruzzo were, before 2011, very small in number (Nanni, 2015, pp. 59-67). Abruzzo has come into contact with the phenomenon of asylum seekers and refugees and the related issues of reception and hospitality only recently. Our previous experience in these issues dates back to the 1990s with the refugees from Former Yugoslavia and Kosovo. The latest years' tensions and wars in the Middle East and in the Sub-Saharan Africa, however, have caused thousands of young women and men, as well as whole families and children, to leave their homes and lands in search of a better fate and, above all, in search of protection. Protection, here, shall be intended both in the specific meaning of International Protection as per the definition of the Status of Refugee in the 1951 Geneva Convention but also, more generally, in the literal sense of the word, i.e. protecting people and property, defending them by whatever harm may come to them. And "harm", in this case, means persecution, torture, murder.

In 2009 and 2010 asylum seekers in Italy averaged 15,000 per year (19,000 in 2009, 12,000 in 2010). But in 2011, following the war in Libya, that figure increased dramatically, reaching about 60,000 people of which 40,000 were asylum seekers.

Asylum requests to the Italian Government soared again in 2014 following more than 150,000 landings on the Italian coasts, and increased again over the last year, effectively reaching about 70,000 requests, almost doubling the 2011 figure (37,000). These figures are at the same time far higher than Italy was and is used to handle and significantly lower than the figures Germany, the United Kingdom and France (that received about 4 million people over the last 25 years) have to deal with. Figures like these require a careful management of resources and total respect for those people, who are forced to leave their country in search of protection.

Reception shall be planned and organised taking into account the context where reception itself occurs; it is necessary to provide suitable services and at the same time guaranteeing high quality standards and working in a synergy with the local communities and stakeholder and also plan and arrange the integrated reception paths.

For this purpose, in 2002, Italy implemented the Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati (Asylum Seekers and Refugees Protection System - shortened in SPRAR) established thanks to an agreement between the Ministry of Interior - Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, the Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In recent years the SPRAR has been recognized by the Human Rights Commission of the Council of Europe as a positive model of reception and hospitality, capable not only of granting real protection to the individuals but also reception, integration and orientation services compliant with high quality standards.

As far as services are concerned SPRAR has increased its reception potential from about 3,000 people in 2010 to more than 4,500 in 2013 up to the impressive achievement of more than 20,000 places in 2014. Currently there are more than 430 active projects that involve local authorities and associations. These projects, as a whole, offer about 1000 places for unaccompanied minors and 300 for people with mental illnesses.

In addition to the places available within the SPRAR network were further reinforced by about 60,000 places in the Centri di Accoglienza Temporanei (Temporary Reception Centres). This increase in the number of available places is necessary to cope with the overwhelming number of landings in 2014 which is also due to the Mare Nostrum project (recently renamed Triton) that also helped in reducing the dramatically high number of casualties by drowning.

Reception in Italy today operates on two levels: A first stage of reception handled by the government (via the Prefectures) and the second level managed by SPRAR.

The first level caters to the basic, most urgent needs of asylum seekers like food, health care and a place to rest and find some serenity. Here the asylum seekers can also formally start the procedure to request and be granted the refugee status.

Then those who are entitled to join any SPRAR project receive the second level reception. Unfortunately, the procedure to assign refugees and asylum seekers to SPRAR projects does not have a well defined timeline and often takes very long, and as a result of that, asylum seekers often have to wait more than one year in a Reception Centre before being included in this project.

The second reception level integrates the basic material needs (food, housing) with other services like cultural and linguistic mediators, orientation, vocational training and education and also employment and social inclusion support activities, all of this backed with legal and psychological/health assistance services.

Abruzzo contributes to reception both with its Temporary Reception Centres and with an increasingly wider participation to SPRAR projects.

In March 2014 about 20 Reception Centres (providing about 600 places) were opened throughout all of the four provinces of Abruzzo: 100 people at three temporary structures in the province of Chieti, 260 places at 8 temporary structures in the province of Teramo, 150 places in 4 temporary structures in the province of Pescara and 72 places at 6 temporary structures in the province of L'Aquila (Data provided by L'Aquila Prefecture as of Nov. 2014).

The SPRAR network in 2010 consisted in one single project in Pescara that provided hospitality to 15 women, in 2013 it grew to two projects (Pescara and L'Aquila) covering 30 people and then grew further to 4 projects (192 people) in 2014. The Chieti SPRAR project hosts 50 people, the women-only Pescara project instead offers 21 places; L'Aquila's project, "Battiti di integrazione" (Heartbeats of integration, managed by the Arci L'Aquila Local Committee) presently features 21 places but it will grow to 36 and the Teramo project is the largest of all (100 places).

On the whole Abruzzo's reception capabilities grew from 15 asylum seekers and refugees in 2011 to about 800 people in 2014, of which about 200 in SPRAR projects and about 600 in Temporary Reception Centres.

"L'Aquila oltre confini" is only a first experience that has helped Abruzzo to devise, implement and experience an inclusion and education path WITH the younger refugees (and not just FOR them) in a troublesome, fragmented territory (See Augé, 2009).

5. Conclusion

The overall objective of the project was therefore to promote social inclusion and active participation in the democratic life of the participants and the persons involved: from foreign children and young people to refugees in the L'Aquila area, from teachers to educators in the broader sense, from local associations to institutions, all united to improve dialogue and cooperation between different cultures and communities.

"L'Aquila oltre i confini" shall be considered, from all points of view, as a project that operates in the field of continuing education, since the meeting of these subjective and objective potentials produces specific individual and collective behaviours.

Among the various aims of the project we wish to highlight: promoting intercultural practices capable of encouraging dialogue and understanding between children and young adults and helping them to develop the critical skills needed to go beyond stereotypes and simplifications; promoting the cultures of origin of migrant communities for the purpose of increasing the self-esteem of the migrants and the Italian youth's knowledge of "different" cultures; supporting active involvement of young refugees as agents of intercultural dialogue and, last but not least identifying, modelling and spreading "good practices" of intercultural education that may be replicated in other contexts.

In addition to proposing concrete activities the associations, together with the University of L'Aquila, act as a solid, reliable support for teachers and social workers, helping them in providing concrete tools for reception and useful contributions to educational innovation in the intercultural pedagogy field. The whole "workshops in schools" initiative (but also the workshops with adult foreigners initiative) has been developed to start a new process of re-reading fairy tales, games and real life stories with an intercultural, or better still trans-cultural eye.

Being intercultural, in pedagogy or in other fields, means reaching out to the territory and the community, connecting institutional stakeholders and associations to people by proposing shared, participation-based processes grounded in an inclusion approach that tries to bridge the deeply ingrained centre/margin gap by setting up interactions and dialogue between the two parts.

Therefore the sustainability of this project lies not only in methodology, but also in its efforts focused on reaching all: people, schools, universities, associations, institutions; it also lies in the transversal nature of its goals and results and in its flexibility and reproducibility in other contexts and with other recipients.

All of this makes *governance* and coordination necessary for the purpose of documenting and circulating good practices for the purpose of boosting and encouraging sustainability and reproducibility of projects, experiments and true ideas and proposals. Intercultural education can do it!

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[1] Original quote: "La paura è causa del rifiuto dell'altro e la storia ci insegna che i rifiuti, le deportazioni e le esclusioni radicali generano destabilizzazioni e violenza. [...] Noi dobbiamo contribuire all'educazione dei popoli per una cultura del dialogo interculturale [...]".

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