

# Multicultural education from theory to practice, using a lifelong learning model.

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## I Background

A number of authors in the United States have discussed multiculturalism from different perspectives, Steinberg, R. (2001) LaBelle, T., Ward, C. (1994), discussed its practice and definition. Authors such as, Sleeter, C, McLaren, P. (1995), Ovando, C.J. McLaren, P. (2000) Giroux H, Lankshear, C., McLaren, P., & Peters, M. (1996) Freire (1998) Torres, C.A.(1998) have discussed this concept from the perspective of critical theory and radical pedagogy. Further, others have used conceptions of multiculturalism based on identity issues (Castells, 1977) or race as determinant for discussion of multicultural practices such as bell hooks (1994).

The concept of multiculturalism is not new in education however it is today a much pointed issue mainly due its political underpinnings. Citizenship, democracy and multiculturalism are part of any educational proposal by policymakers and educators. Multiculturalism has emerged in the last few years not only as a response to the constitution of a pedagogical subject but as an interaction of the pedagogical subject and the political subject.

In Latin America much of these concepts are not used in the same manner in the political, educational conception as in the United States. There are for instances larger gaps of research information regarding Afro- Latin Americans poor educational attainment, and little is mentioned on people's sexual orientation. Earlier writings on Africanism in Latin America were more directed to documentation of the influences of Afro- musical rhythms in society, historical accounts of slavery, and economic labor issues as in the case of mining in Mexico and sugar plantation in Brazil Cuba, and to a certain extent Colombia, Ecuador and Peru (UNESCO 1979).

Recently with educational reforms, regional economic integration and political changes occurring in Latin America one of the countries that have come closest to the United States in the context of developing a multicultural approach in education is Brazil. The Lula government has developed a policy of cultural integration using multicultural concepts at all levels of education including a quota system in higher education for Afro Brazilian descendants (Matos, 2001, Patrocínio, Luz 2001) In this case the policy developed by the Brazilian government has been one of integration between non-formal adult education programs and those of traditional schooling. It is developed through their educational reform and decentralization process policies affecting all levels of education.

The second largest country in Latin America, Mexico, traditionally one of the most advanced in the region on the issue of cultural differences; due to its "indigenistas" policies dedicated to preserve cultural traditions from post-colonial times has no visible advances in such directions. This is discussed by Mexican authors (Rodríguez, M.,2005, Ibarrola, M,

2005 ) who believe that by promoting a discussion and developing a more inclusive multicultural policies in education and its integration to formal curriculum as well as in teacher training will benefit future students. It is also part of the discourse of democratization and participation in a global world. It is understood that with traditional forms of social exclusions by class, and income other issues such as race and gender will continue to hinder democratic participation, erode national identity and economic opportunity.

Mexico participation in the NAFTA agreement with Canada and the United States promotes through one its programs COHACE equalization and transfer of not only academic skills but social skills, including the recognition of different social groups through the borders of the three countries. In view of these developments the Mexican authors consider the matter of multiculturalism and integration is an urgent one. For instance discussion on Afro-Mexicans population, its inclusion in the larger society still remains almost unknown for educators and people at large. (Vaughn, 2004) Little is researched in this context and information is reduced to “anecdotes and vignettes declaring a small minority sector of the Mexican population a pauper and invisible one with no political options”. (Muhammad, J.1995, p. 180).

## II Conception and definition of the project

This research focal point was to investigate the concept of multiculturalism as is used in two higher education teacher training programs in México. These two programs are located in México City with their main campus specifically in what refers to adult education programs and non formal education programs provided to NGOs. The second institution is another university also in México City with a traditional teacher training program. The research also seeks to understand the differences on the conception of multiculturalism in Mexico from one that traditionally has used “indigenismo” associated to pre-hispanics groups to one that includes a conception of cultures from larger perspectives associated to democratization and political participation. This is perhaps the most complex portion of the work since there are strong views in this matter with respect to “indigenismo.”

Lifelong learning in this case is treated as the concept that allows not only traditional age students to participate in educational tasks being this formal or non-formal but those who were left out of a system such those who are illiterate. Using a lifelong learning concept it is possible to extend educational opportunities to large pool of citizens this associating education to democratization and political participation. . Moreover, in an increasingly internationalized context, it is important to know and understand one's neighbors, partners, and competitors. A country that undergoes reexamination of their identity and future as a nation, for example, plan for greater integration within their region This, in turn, demands a much more sophisticated appreciation of regional cultural, political, economic, religious, and social traditions. In a lifelong learning model this is possible at any level of the educational structure.

### **III Research questions**

There are three research questions that address this research.

How Mexican educators who are in the business of teacher training or training adult educators define the concept of multiculturalism from their own practice?

How Afro-Mexican people are represented in curriculums for teacher training or training of adult educators?

Is there a trend in policymaking in Latin American education about inclusion of multiculturalism in education using these concepts as an integral part of political participation and integration?

### **IV Methodology**

This work uses Paulo Freire (1998) McLaren, (2000) Torres, (1998) Giroux (1996) conceptions of critical pedagogy in terms of the analysis of multicultural issues and its application to issues of citizenship and political participation.

It used written material in Spanish from articles, books to curriculums and guides used by the Instituto Nacional de Educacion de Adultos (INEA) and those used by the Academy of Adult and Non Formal Education of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional and the teacher program at Universidad Iberoamericana in their training for educators. This literature review should provide with conceptions of multiculturalism and pluralism, its current state and arguments proposed by the different authors.

In terms of a method uses a “focus group approach” with training teachers at Universidad One and Universidad Two in Mexico City to elicit their reactions to the concept of multiculturalism in education, curriculum inclusion and social participation.

The review of written material of Mexican literature and the results of the focus groups provided with baseline information about the state of multiculturalism in Mexico using two higher education institutions.

### **V Proposed Outcomes**

Develop baseline information on multiculturalism used in teacher training programs in Mexico

Compare these results to prevalent views in the United States and Canada in their philosophical and critical views.

Develop with these results initial information for comparison of the concept of multiculturalism and its use in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The second portion of the proposal is to investigate what aspect of Afro-Mexican culture is part of curriculum for teacher training at these institutions.

## **VI Results:**

Preliminary results indicate that exist plenty of information when prospective educators are asked about their knowledge of multiculturalism. Much of this information comes through instructors, readings provided by the instructors, and about collective tasks that have a grade attached to the task.

For most of the prospective educators multiculturalism and interculturalism are considered equal/ synonymous concepts, but when they are asked about why they are synonymous no specific reason is given.

According to the discussion with students the literature suggests that these are similar concepts. Moreover these themes are treated as single subjects in a curricular context and for the most part disconnected of other subjects. Specialists tend to teach these courses providing for more specificity than an interdisciplinary context.

Race and language tend to be the immediate descriptors of a multicultural concept. When required about gender orientation, feminism, discapacity. Africanism and racism the concept seems to be short to explain diversity.

A number of participants also indicated that in Mexico still exists a strong Marxian view in terms of the philosophy of education thus promoting a more economics' view of education rather than one oriented to the larger society and its differences. In many cases this more structuralist view also prevent discussions about gender orientation.

A number of discussants indicated that they personally would like to implement a more open diverse view in their place of work, but institutionally this is impossible since there is a vertical mandate in terms of policies.

Many defended their indigenist views as very important for the country due to historical reason and adhering to them. When confronted with the view that a large percentage of the first nation groups in Mexico still leave in extreme poverty, illiteracy is still high in many areas where indigenous groups leave and schooling is of low quality they indicated that is part of the process of dominant / dominated class rather than a failure of educational policies that are not inclusive.

## **VII Discussion:**

This paper discusses multicultural education from two perspectives. One is using the concept of lifelong learning and second attaching this concept to preliminary findings on a research done in Mexico. It is assumed that with the mobile nature of work through the three countries region, and the current discussion about citizenship and participation, multiculturalism should be on the top of the agenda as a transversal skill in educational curriculums in institutions of higher education.

Mexico educational programs with a long history of an indigenist curriculum has not debated vigorously the merits or difficulties of the concept of multiculturalism perhaps due to many forms in which this concept can be treated. It is also a fact that this situation is almost universal through most Latin American countries with a few exceptions.

Preliminary conclusions indicate that educational institutions that engage in a systematic process of curriculum revitalization using multiculturalism will have an immediate effect in professional training. These effects are related to social participation and social equity as immediate results.

Cultural diversity is a salient characteristic of the Latin American and Caribbean societies, in this sense it is said that they are usually "multicultural." On the other hand, as consequence of the growing importance of local and government initiatives and policies, usually denominated "interculturales", there is a recognition and handling of the cultural diversity in equal and mutually respectful ways, which then tend to be expanded as the interpretation that the idea of "interculturalidad" in which objectives or experiences are exclusively valued positively.

As a consequence of this paradigm, the use of the idea usually reserved for "interculturalidad" to qualify exclusively to programs and experiences that offer recognition and mutual respect among culturally diverse human groups. However, a more careful use of the term "interculturalidad" forces us to include under this concept all type of human experiences characterized by the importance of dynamic of relationship among human groups that are perceived mutually as culturally diverse, be that these can be qualified as positive or negative.

In this sense, it is necessary to recognize that the Latin American and Caribbean societies are not only characterized to be culturally diverse, but also as intercultural, in the wide sense of the term. That is to say, they are characterized by the importance of the intercultural relationships in their history and dynamic socio-cultural contemporary, this way these exhibit problematic features. Although, in strict sense, the intercultural idea cannot only be referred to cases of ethnic differences, but also religious, socioeconomic and other, this project will limit its reach to cases that the social actors conceptualize in terms of identities and ethnic and racial differences, that that in the usual languages in the region usually expresses in terms of indigenous towns and populations of afrodescendents.

In Latin America many dictatorships left the ground prepared for the installation of the neo-liberal educational policies. In the case of Chile, a country where was carried out the first experiment on educational reform in a pilot program, it was Pinochet's own government the one that headed the economic adjustment follow by an unequal educational policy. . Pinochet, as well as Menem, Fujimori, Sanguinetti and then Cardoso, received the political-educational orientations and the programmatic package of the World Bank without carrying out adaptations to the reality of their country and without conditioning any aspect of the demanded reformation. Neither the rulers neither the technicians had interest in the

concrete subjects of the education. Their work was concentrated in educational system the "it adjusts", begun before in the other areas of the State.

Features of these policies are just to name few:

They use universal categories that apply to all the educational systems and that they don't admit adaptation some to the national or regional characteristics

It deepens the previous socio-cultural inequality from which the population receives formal education;

## **VIII Conclusions**

It is important to produce knowledge not only from the experiences of intercultural universities indigenous and afrodescendents but also from the conflict, problems, demands, and initiatives that emerge from the communities. This allow for a course of action that help to improve the capacity of response from the institutions of higher education. In turn this will help these institutions with the quality of their educational offer and satisfy their demands as well as will help institutions to produce knowledge that relate to the communities in mutual respect.

This would favor the possibilities of these institutions to not only improve the quality and covering of their educational offer, but also of to produce knowledge and to be related with the respective societies, from perspectives consciously elaborated in terms of valuation, mutual respect and very conversant use of the resources that the cultural diversity and the interculturalidad characteristic of these societies.

Additionally, this comprehensive focus will allow to identify and to analyze the diverse forms in that he/she understands each other and it puts into practice the interculturalidad idea in the environment of the superior education, as well as the problems, challenges and opportunities that these

The term multiculturalism has been used as descriptive category, as an analytic paradigm, for sociological explanations or a historical concept to describe the reality of "living together" among different cultural groups in the same social context. It also represent in cases divergent political pedagogical proposals or in other cases as form of creating closeness among ethnic cultural differences. Pedagogically it should represent a form of education that promotes respect for human diversity.

Interculturality on the other hand in general denotes incongruent perspectives and realities or in other cases interculturalism is a way to understand what is different in the singularity of each human being.

Multicultural policies created with the intervention of the State. . The case of Brazil is a good example of the intervention of the State in the development pf a cultural policy. Brazil identified itself as a racial democracy. In 1995 the Brazilian state recognized a deep problem with racism in the country. Two laws were enacted at all levels of education in

formal and non formal programs: a quota systems and affirmative action laws. (Arocena, 2008).

This made possible a number of other programs and opening the space not only for students to participate in access to school but creating an input for curricular inclusive reforms from local communities to higher education.

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