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ABSTRACT

In an era increasingly characterized by pluralism and globalization, intercultural pedagogy represents a starting point for addressing the challenges that today's society confronts us with daily. Throughout history, cultures have changed through interactions, exchanges, and hybridization, leading to the formation of an increasingly pluralistic and multicultural society. Against this background, it is crucial to develop approaches based on dialogue and mutual recognition. However, acceptance and willingness to encounter require an educational path that is promoted by schools from childhood, especially in view of the monocultural mentality that too often characterizes more and more people and prevents the opening of a path that counteracts ethnocentrism in favor of a broader perspective. From this point of view, intercultural pedagogy proves to be the only approach that can guarantee the formation of individuals ready to create a truly multicultural society.

Keywords: diversity; education; globalisation; identity; interculturality; intercultural pedagogy; monocultural mind; multiculturalism; plural mind; plural society.

1. IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY

Although every culture has been modified and hybridized in its relations with other cultures since the earliest times (Ceruti, 2018), today, of course, we live in a present increasingly characterized by a web of dense relations between individuals and cultures. We are talking, of course, about the process of globalization which, starting from the economic sphere, has rapidly spread to practically all areas of society, bringing together contexts that

would have had nothing to do with each other just a few years ago. The contact between even distant geographical areas, increasingly facilitated by technology, has made possible the development of a plural society made up of cultures that intertwine and influence each other, so that borders are becoming increasingly blurred. Interactions and hybridizations between cultures, forms of spirituality, and heterogeneous forms of knowledge now seem to occur with significant frequency even in the everyday experiences of many individuals and communities (Ceruti, 2018).

In a society made up of diversity, i.e. something with which, willingly or unwillingly, we will have to live with every day (Balslev & Rorty, 2001), it is indeed essential to develop behaviours that respect diversity and thus the person, in a dialogical approach that makes it possible to create a relationship that can be both similar and different, recognizing in the other a being that is similar to us in its human essence and at the same time different because he or she is the bearer of new qualities, every human being thus carries a dual aspect of the human being – it is not rigid, static and fixed once and for all, but dynamic, mobile, changeable, subject to ups and downs depending on the external context, the needs of the moment, the expectations of the environment and even our state of mind and age (Kapuściński, 2006). It is, in this sense, a principle of recognition and valorisation (Ellerani, 2014) that does not stop at the cognitive level alone, but rather presupposes a profound change affecting the emotional level capable of shaping all those involved.

We must ask ourselves, at this point, how personal and cultural identity is formed in relation to diversity. If it is true, in fact, that both parties involved are called upon to reflect on their own culture and to choose how to relate to the other, then it becomes sacrosanct to understand that it is impossible not to be contaminated by the other with whom a relationship is woven, but that on the contrary, it is necessary to undertake a lifelong learning process capable of educating individuals who live in a mestizo culture. Acceptance, welcome, and readiness to meet are not to be understood as automatic approaches but must be developed by accompanying the subject in a path that favours intercultural communication that makes dialogue possible, understood as speaking with others, since the intercultural experience is such only if the ego of each subject expands in the direction of the other, making room for his or her point of view (Nanni & Abbruciati, 1999). Only by entering into a relationship with this assumption will it be possible to embark on the path that leads to the profound transformation of the individual.

As mentioned, however, it is good to remember that, at the time of the encounter, everyone brings with them a cultural habitus that inevitably

shapes and moulds them: is the fruit of a relationship, of one or more relationships that the individual weaves in the course of his or her history. Precisely because of these characteristics, i.e. the need to consider identity as plural and dynamic, it would be wrong to believe that it lacks coherence simply because it is characterized by being full of so many facets. At the same time, it would also be wrong to want to constrain it into static boundaries with the fear that, in crossing them, one will encounter some kind of threat. When the individual is reduced – or is forced to be reduced – to only one of its many facets of identity, then one runs into a fatalist conception whereby it is what it is from birth, and therefore cannot transform or evolve. If this were the case, then, as Amartya Sen would say, we would be dealing with a society based on solitary affiliation (Sen, 2006), in which the subject is from the beginning bound to traits inherited from his habitus with no possibility of choice and no power to change. This solitarist approach is belied, however, by the faculty of rational science, which allows the individual to decide which affiliations to attach greater importance to.

It is precisely the plurality of the individual that makes this choice possible: giving priority to one belonging does not mean, however, totally erasing other identities or failing to recognize them as bearers of value. It means, instead, making a decision on the exact weight that identity holds for him/her in relation to the importance of other categories to which, at the same time, it belongs (Sen, 2006) in a context that protects cultural freedom in such a way as to make the development of diversity possible.

2. NAVIGATING DIFFERENT MINDSETS IN CONTEMPORARY AGE

When related to culture, identity can take on an ambivalent character. While it is true that a strong sense of one's own identity improves life within the community (Sen, 2006) and intensifies relations with one's neighbour, it is also true that solidarity with members of one's own group can turn into hostility towards others. Mind, this does not mean that identity should be eliminated, and it is indeed essential to preserve the sense of pride one feels in being part of a group, but it is necessary to bear in mind that this must not become a source of violence and terror (Sen, 2006) since a culture that is completely closed in on itself and self-sufficient is conceptually and historically meaningless (Nanni & Abbruciati, 1999). As mentioned at the outset, cultures have always been in contact with each other for commercial and social reasons: deciding what the boundaries are therefore becomes a purely political need, and consequently, the relations

between cultures are influenced precisely by the encounter/confrontation that each one has with the others, reaching degrees of success when differences have come together to address common problems, which has generated a space for innovative confrontation.

When it comes to educational processes and identity formation, the school becomes a protagonist as a focal centre of exchange for all the individuals who benefit from it. In recent decades, there has been an increase in foreign pupils in Italian schools. We are talking about individuals who have arrived in Italy or were born in our country of foreign parents: especially in the latter case, it is easy for them to question their own identity, split as it is between the environment in which they grow up and that in which they live. This splitting, very often, is experienced with conflict, as it is difficult for the person experiencing it to be adequately accompanied in his or her path of growth and discovery of his or her own identity: in these cases, a situation is created in which the person believes he or she has to make a transition both of growth – from childhood to adolescence to adulthood – and of integration within the society in which he or she lives, which, at least in some aspects, will necessarily be different – and often even distant – from the one in which the family raised him or her.

It is the school, at this juncture, that is called to the front line to provide concrete support to the student who never feels completely at his or her place. Since confrontation with otherness, in fact, makes it possible to understand how one's own point of view is not unique and inescapable, the school and its pedagogical project are indispensable in a learning process aimed at elaborating an idea of plural identity and multiple selves, for which a multidimensional, plurilingual and pluricultural educational itinerary can be outlined; on the other, it is aimed at elaborating an idea of interculture, for which to hypothesize and construct a network of institutional collaborations with a view to a system of competent and appropriately integrated social, cultural and educational offers (Pinto Minerva, 2002). The pedagogical project we are talking about, in this case, is one that enables the search for new forms, tools, and opportunities capable of forming the basis of a constructive and creative dialogue for the creation of a society that can truly call itself multicultural. To form such a context, however, we must start from the grassroots.

When we speak of interculturality, we must necessarily first define the concept of pluralism, since the cognitive matrix of intercultural education is plurality and its natural enemy is single thinking, homologation as a process of wiping out differences and the triumph of monoculturalism (Pinto Minerva, 2002). In short, we are talking about a complex system that repudiates in every way monocultural categories, which are unsuit-

able for understanding reality and interacting with other individuals. The mind must be educated to a complex system that must, however, also be intercultural, that is, able to cope with the problems that reality poses every day. When we speak of complex thinking, however, we mean above all a thinking that binds, on the one hand contextualizing, i.e. linking to the context, and on the other hand trying to understand what a system is (Morin, 1999).

A monocultural mindset indicates a deep involvement in one's own culture, leading one to believe that the world is limited to this one perspective. This is, as we have said, a problematic approach to say the least, since it tends to cause limited thinking about one's own culture and that of others. The monocultural mentality, in short, causes the individual to think of his own as a superior culture, homogenizing all others and consequently ignoring the peculiarities that make each society unique and worthy of being placed on the same level. This type of approach, moreover, very often leads to the loss of a vast heritage of knowledge and traditions that, not being properly preserved and handed down, risk falling into oblivion and disappearing from common knowledge.

3. PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES FOR AN INTERCULTURAL MIND

Today, unfortunately, we are witnessing the entrenchment of this type of mentality: even though tradition has been handing down continuous exchanges since the dawn of humanity, it is also true that societies have always had discriminatory and closed attitudes towards cultures that might appear different or distant from their own. This closure leads individuals to remain imprisoned in a static state that does not allow meaningful dialogue between cultures, preventing the full development of globality. The multicultural mindset, from this perspective, proves to be advantageous in that it profoundly transforms the mental structure. It is a mindset that is open, flexible, and ready to face multiple situations, which can offer degrees of freedom and flexibility unimaginable by those who are locked in a monocultural mindset (Anolli, 2006). It is a mindset that knows how to interact with other cultures precisely because it is able to recognize the partiality of its own point of view, placing itself in an attitude of curiosity and openness towards cultures. The confrontation between different models of thought offers a wide range of possibilities and freedom in exploring the potential of existence. The openness of the multicultural mindset also implies the acquisition of different systems of meaning, allowing the construction of additional paths of meaning.

Intercultural communication requires first and foremost mutual acceptance and should be seen both as a response to the social challenges of contemporary society and as an ethical and cognitive task. The first aspect is practical and relates to current issues in the world, including the acceptance of migrants, dialogue, and cooperation in learning.

Dialogue, in particular, is a fundamental tool to combat racism and fear of diversity, provided it is guided by rationality and reasoning. It is a challenging task that requires one to move forward toward one's neighbour in order to understand and approach him, but at the same time, it also requires one to take a step back by reflecting on one's beliefs without abandoning them or considering them relativistically equivalent to all others. This balance is essential to appreciate diversity without homologising it with other differences, because not all differences are equal. It is therefore a challenge for a new model of culture, radically different from the traditional one – Western or Greek-Christian-bourgeois – and able to review the foundations of this model and propose new ones (Cambi, 2001), in order to overcome ethnocentrism through a positive approach that promotes tolerance and rational choices, replacing the emphasis on belonging and place. From a theoretical point of view, interculturalism challenges the ever-changing mindset of Western man, which constantly tests the practices he is confronted with and his resistance. This challenge requires constant adaptation in order not to fall into the closed paradigms from which one wants to distance oneself. It is a matter of challenging tradition and the cultural habitus based on primary identity in order to foster new cognitive and ethical attitudes, which is a challenging thing to do and meets with deep resistance that seeks to preserve old models.

The pedagogical frontier is dynamic, in a complex process stretching between the present and the future. Interculture contributes to developing an ecological, inclusive, and dialogical pedagogical approach, based on the principles of equality, emancipation, non-violence, and difference. Pedagogy recognizes its importance but knows it cannot meet this challenge alone; therefore, it draws on other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy, promoting their interaction. Pedagogy focuses not only on how to deal with different cultures but also on how to facilitate encounters between them, regulating and orienting dialogue towards listening. Pedagogy stands as the core of the ever-evolving rationalization of interculture, aiming at constructive communication. This challenge embraces the uncertainty of outcomes, which is intrinsic to the very nature of pedagogy, both as pedagogical action and as “project knowledge”.

The individual must rethink himself, redefine himself without fixed boundaries, embracing complexity, pluralism, and a new, decentralized per-

spective. His approach to the world must be flexible, adaptable, free, and oriented towards dynamic experiences. Likewise, culture must evolve towards a pluralistic and decentralized perspective, breaking away from the rigidity of simplification and systematization. It must open itself to hybridization and creativity and manifest itself in different forms, moments, and ways. Furthermore, society must reorganize itself as a pluralistic society without a central point of reference that values individuality in its many possibilities. Intercultural pedagogy starts from the complexity that characterizes each culture and each individual. It recognizes the plural and multicultural nature of each of us and values and supports not only the diversity between individuals but also the diversity within individuals (Ceruti, 2018).

In this age of pluralism and complexity, it is essential to outline the fundamentals of pedagogy, because schools are facing new challenges and cannot improvise educational paths or take routes whose outcomes they do not know. The significant changes initiated in the third millennium require adequate preparation to cope with the increasing mobility of people and languages. Interculturality represents a paradigm shift that abandons the monocultural pedagogical approach in favour of a recognition-based thinking that opens up different pedagogical perspectives. Intercultural pedagogy is a way of thinking that starts from cultural specificity but integrates a dimension of universality through sharing common elements. This pedagogy is open to exploring the possible and does not follow a predefined approach. It is primarily a relational pedagogy that focuses on the relationships between people from different cultures in order to develop a formative practice.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Intercultural education should be seen as an integral and structural part of the educational process, not limited to the context, but fundamental for dealing with the complexity of contemporary reality on a conceptual and educational level. This type of pedagogy should integrate complexity, overcome seemingly irreconcilable differences, and serve as a space to explore intercultural dynamics in the relationship with meanings and in the creation of codes and symbolic heritages of reference.

Individuals must also learn to deal with both external influences and their own potential and to explore independently the risks and opportunities associated with their choices. Education should be seen as a continuous learning path. The educational goal for each individual should be the realization of their best form in life by reaching the maximum of their

potential. Education aims at autonomy, and an example for that could be the ability to self-regulate, and it is based on the surrounding culture and environment while taking into account individual characteristics and differences, adapts the educational method to the needs and learning styles of each learner in order to make it effective and meaningful in a context of lifelong learning, and is able to accompany individuals throughout their lives and support them through any obstacles they may face.

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RIASSUNTO

In un'era sempre più caratterizzata dal pluralismo e dalla globalizzazione, la pedagogia interculturale si pone quale punto di partenza per affrontare le sfide a cui la società odierna ci mette davanti ogni giorno. Le culture, nel corso della storia, si sono modificate

grazie a interazioni, scambi e ibridazioni, che hanno portato alla formazione di una società sempre più pluralistica e multiculturale. Risulta quindi fondamentale, dato il contesto, sviluppare approcci basati sul dialogo e sul riconoscimento reciproco. L'accettazione, l'accoglienza e la disponibilità all'incontro richiedono però un percorso educativo promosso dalla scuola sin dall'infanzia, soprattutto considerando la mentalità monoculturale che troppo spesso caratterizza sempre più individui, precludendo l'apertura di una strada che contrasti l'etnocentrismo a favore di una prospettiva più ampia. La pedagogia interculturale, in quest'ottica, si dimostra l'unico approccio in grado di garantire la formazione di individui disponibili alla creazione di una vera società multiculturale.

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