

SESSION III

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION
UNDER MULTICULTURALISM**

FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO INTERCULTURALISM: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

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The question of an intercultural education was posed first in societies with large immigrants' flows, but could not be developed because of unifying conceptions of culture and education. In the United States, during a long period, the common school was considered as the melting pot where all ethnic differences would be merged to make the American citizen. In fact it was simply a process of assimilation into the dominant WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) culture. The resistance of the minorities, the failure of the model, have brought about the emergence of a more humanistic vision, more respectful of cultural identities. In the former Soviet Union, socialism admitted the equality of all peoples, of their cultural rights and the use of their own languages. However, this did not prevent the disappearance of more than sixty languages which could not resist Russian, the language of economic activities, of social promotion and of political power. On the other side, in spite of the expansion of the Russian language and socialist education, national consciousness and religion have persisted, notably Islam in Central Asia. Western Europe is confronted with the problem of immigrant workers brought into Europe during its long period of industrial expansion, 1945-70. They represent today ten million, most of whom will remain with their families.

Of course, when we deal with minorities, we must distinguish between nationals and immigrants. The first ones are citizens : the second ones are not : they have not the same rights. In fact, the differences are of degree and not of nature. Legal equality is nowhere sufficient to compensate for inequalities and discrimination in real life. In certain countries (Guatemala, Bolivia, South Africa until this year) the demographic majority, Indian or African, is (was) a political, economic and social minority. In Japan, the Ainu and the burakumin who are nationals, have been discriminated against for many centuries.

Today most countries in the world are multicultural. The adjective "multi" means that several or many ethno-cultural groups simply live besides one another within the same boundaries without much exchange nor understanding. On the contrary, there are frequently tensions and conflicts between the majority and the minorities and between the minorities themselves, for economic, social, historical, reasons. How can education bring about a better understanding between those groups, and transform this "multiculturalism" into an "interculturalism," implying comprehension, cooperation, interdependence and sympathy ?

In many countries, what is called "intercultural education" is addressed only to children of immigrant families at the primary level. It is meant to adapt them to the school system, to remedy their difficulties, rather than to foster a mutual understanding. The culture of the host country is not presented since it is the "reference." The culture of the immigrants is reduced to a number of linguistic and folkloric elements (food, handicrafts, festivals, etc...), without being integrated into the system of which they are a part and which gives them

meaning.

A true "intercultural education" should address itself not to a particular section of the population, but to the whole society, to children and adults, in and out of the school, through all the environment (families, churches, associations, trade unions and media); to children because their age is the most impressionable, the time when values, ways of thinking and habits are most deeply internalized, to adults because they are parents, citizens, producers, public opinion and leaders, and in these various capacities they exert a considerable influence on the evolution of ideas and practices.

How should this intercultural education be developed? It should not be an additional separate subject because the curriculum is already overburdened, which would result in more weariness for the child. The intercultural element should permeate all the disciplines, which presents a double advantage: to stimulate the interest of the child by opening to him/her new horizons; to introduce this "interdisciplinarity" which consists of dealing with a topic by approaching it from different points of view. Culture will not be taken with its elitist, intellectualist connotation (which undervalues oral traditions), but in its anthropological meaning: the whole of material and non-material productions of a human group in their relations with nature and with other groups, productions which have for them or for the majority of them a sense, derived from their past or living history, which is not shared by other groups. This conception emphasizes the fact that culture is not only an heritage, but is always on the move, constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by successive generations under internal or external influences.

Learning *foreign languages* introduces different ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, other logical categories and values, the social meanings of language, its uses and variations (because language serves not only to communicate, but also to differentiate, to hierarchise, to dominate).

Let me take the concept of reason in two great civilizations. In the West reason comes from the Latin *ratio* which means calculation : reason is the faculty to think and act not according to our feelings, but our interests. But *ratio* also translates the Greek *logos*, that is, the coherent word, the discourse arranged according to universal principles. In the Chinese language, reason is *li* which indicates the veins of jade. Why the veins of jade? The lapidary follows them to bring out a square, a rectangle, a disc (*bi*), a half-moon *huang*, independently of any preconceived model. "To reason is to search for the formal structure of reality in view of adapting action to it". One sees the difference between this conception and the Western one. Both are equally efficient to act upon the world if we think of the economic expansion first of Japan, more recently of East Asia.

The teaching of *literatures* should be comparative and concentrate on the major works of the world, including oral literatures. The aim is to make the young discover the multiple aspects of human nature, its universal characteristics and its variations in space and time through the comparison of national and foreign texts on the same topics. Humanism will take its full meaning when Li Bai, Basho, Nguy n Du, will be studied beside Shakespeare, Goethe, Victor Hugo.

Geography and *history* will show the close liaison of physical and human phenomena, of peoples and cultures, and how much the great civilizations have been constituted and enriched by foreign borrowings. Japan imported from China through Korea writing, confucianism and political institutions. China was invigorated by Indian buddhism, as well as Japan,

Korea, Viet Nam, and all the countries of Central and Southeast Asia. In Europe, the two pillars of any advanced civilization — writing and paper — are both of Asian origin. The Greek alphabet was adapted from the Phoenician and passed on to Latin via Etruscan, and led to the European alphabets. Paper came originally from Egyptian papyrus, then from parchment made in Pergamon, before being replaced by rag paper of Chinese origin introduced by the Arabs. Islam picked up the Greek inheritance and the Indian numbers, including the zero, and transmitted them to Medieval Europe, along with its own philosophical, scientific and technical contributions.

Artistic and musical education provides access to the rich and complex diversity of cultures and their artistic criteria. However certain works of art are appreciated by people from different cultures, which means that the relativity of the notion of beauty is itself relative. With the advance of Alexander in Asia the Gandhara sculpture school moulded for the first time the face of the Buddha on the model of the Greek Apollo except for the smile. In the nineteenth century, the discovery of the Japanese print was as decisive for the formation of impressionism as that of African sculpture for cubism at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the United States jazz was born from the Negro-American folklore which assimilated Protestant songs and popular European themes. Jazz has now conquered the world.

How to introduce and expand intercultural education ? Three conditions are necessary :

I. *The preparation of teaching material*

An indispensable task is to revise textbooks when ideas and illustrations do not square with verity and do not respect other people. Two articles published in the *Unesco Courier* of March 1979 have examined racism in school textbooks.

The American Beryle Banfield writes : "History is usually presented from a Eurocentric perspective omitting or distorting the history of the Third World peoples prior to the European contact. Third World peoples are portrayed as incapable of having developed their own institutions prior to the coming of the Europeans... The slaughter of indigenous people is glossed over and the defenders of their homelands are depicted as marauding 'savages' and cruel murderers... The colonization and slavery experiences are presented as beneficial to Third World peoples providing them with discipline and skills previously unknown to them."

For the Argentinian educationist Hugo Ortega, the concept of "discovery" of America is ethnocentric since "it presumes that the Continent, its people and its wealth only acquired value *because* they were discovered and recognized by the center of the world, in other words, Europe... The indigenous person is often denigrated and considered an object. History omits information essential to the understanding of the complex causes of the decadence of the indigenous Argentine nations... All this amounts to a process of negation, of a kind of cultural genocide which in turn leads to an indirect form of real genocide which consists of depriving an important ethnic minority of a share in the resources of their land of origin."

II. *The role of the media*

Audio-visual media, specially television, take a considerable place in the life of most children and youth for the better and for the worst. Therefore they should not only serve as teaching means, but also be subjects of teaching and critical study so as to enable the individual to select information and not to be manipulated by it, and use it in view of his/her own development. The assistance of adults is indispensable for a profitable utilization of media, under the condition of course that they themselves have a critical mind.

Such an education should begin in the family where parents should impose a certain self discipline in the "consumption" of media, at least to preserve communication with their children. They will be relayed by the teacher, who will organize discussion groups concerning a broadcast or a film. Students learn better when they play an active role : preparing the discussion, looking out for documentation, answering questions. For example, in connection with a documentary on a foreign culture, the teacher may ask the following questions : how was it prepared ? With or without the participation of nationals ? Do nationals intervene during the film ? Who are they (men, women, young, adults, their social condition) ? Do their opinions converge or diverge, on what topics, and why ? Are there other documents which go in the same or in a contrary direction ? etc... Occasionally the teacher may invite persons knowing the concerned culture, having travelled in the country, to come and give their opinion. The critical mind forms itself from a confrontation of points of view, observation of possible contradictions in the message, between it and other data, verifying if affirmations are demonstrated or not, etc...

Cinema, television, radio can play an important role to make people sensitive to other cultures, to open their horizons, in reporting cultural events (exhibitions, recitals, movies, theatrical performances), in producing or retransmitting informative programmes, in organizing discussions on historical and cultural items, etc. They should refrain from repeating stereotypes or stock phrases.

III. *The training of teachers*

What precedes show how important is the training of teachers for the success of a real intercultural education. The intercultural dimension should permeate all that is taught in teacher training institutions which actually lack it. In particular, comparative education is taught in very few countries, not being considered as a priority.

The teacher of a multicultural school should receive a minimum information about the cultures which he/she will face, to avoid misunderstandings or incomprehension. For example, he/she must know that in Africa and Asia the child does not look the teacher (or an adult) in the eyes. This is a respectful attitude towards somebody who is a superior or simply an older person. Similarly, in certain cultures, one says "yes" in turning the head from left to right and not in nodding.

Knowledge is necessary but more necessary is openness, the aptitude to put oneself in the place of the other. An article in *Unesco Sources* (June 1991) describes how the principal of

a nursery school in a Parisian suburb inhabited by many immigrant workers succeeded in turning it into a place of peace, respect for human rights and appreciation of different cultures. "Every occasion was seized to reinforce such values. The children sipped jasmine tea on the Chinese New Year, and decorated their faces with henna at the end of Romadan, the Moslem holy month of fasting. Music at the school ranges from jazz to African rythms. Poetry runs from simple French works by poets like Jacques Prevert to North African litanies. Nature is also often used to bring the notion of respect for life. In one project, the children planted a vegetable garden and were made responsible for its survival and growth. They later picked the vegetables and took them into the kitchen for lessons in culture and geography as they learned about different styles of cooking. They also cared for a little menagerie of cats, hamsters, turtles and snails: 'this led to discussions about cages, life and freedom.' No subject is taboo. Problems are not ignored as the school tries to teach tolerance. A major effort has also been made to involve parents. Information sheets are printed about school activities and parents are invited to the special events and holiday celebrations. They are also urged to come in and give little talks to the children about their different cultures. Some have chosen to tell a traditional story; others have brought in national dishes." This nursery school has 260 children aged two to six, 45% come from immigrant families, mostly from North and Black Africa. In all, 20 to 25 countries are represented.

It is one of the Unesco associated schools set up from 1953 to further international understanding and peace. From 33 secondary schools in 15 states, the Project is comprised in 1991 of 2511 institutions ranging from nursery schools to teacher-training colleges in 101 countries. They help young people learn to understand each other and work together in developing curriculum, exchanging students, teachers and information, forming attitudes and spurring action on the local, national and international scene.

Of course, intercultural education is not able to remedy problems such as unemployment, economic difficulties or political antagonisms between social classes and between governments. At least it can lessen or remove preconceptions and prejudices in showing that men and women of all countries in the world share the same needs and aspirations, the same pleasures and sorrows, that the differences do not derive from the color of the skin or from native mental structures, but from history, religion or philosophy, or from the difference of problems that they have to solve in their environment, from the techniques of production or communication available, etc... Intercultural education shows both the relativity of points of view and the common stock of all cultures because men and women everywhere are biologically the same and have the same essential rationality of life and survival, because, to use a Confucian expression, "all in the four seas are brothers."

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