Intercultural Practices in Latin American Nation States

Fidel Tubino; translation and introduction by John H. Sinnigen

Introduction by John H. Sinnigen

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collaboration with others are transdisciplinary, combining philosophy, anthropology, sociolinguistics, pedagogical practices and educational policy and institutions. He is the co-author of *Interculturalidad, un desafío*, 1992 (*Interculturality, a Challenge*) and also the co-author of the anthropological and sociolinguistic study *Jenetian*, 2007, and of numerous articles in journals in Spain, Mexico, Bolivia, Chile and Peru. Any Google search will turn up many of his long list of publications and interviews in Spanish.²

Tubino’s work is part of the theory and praxis of *la interculturalidad* (interculturality) in Latin America. Interculturality in Latin America is a historic condition that points to the need for the radical restructuring of the historically pronounced uneven relations of wealth and power that have existed between Europeans and their descendants, on the one hand, and indigenous and other subordinated groups, on the other hand during the last half millennium. This history has been characterised by an ongoing process of conquest, exploitation, resistance and redignification of the indigenous people. Interculturality is used to describe the necessary conditions for a new social configuration that allows historically marginalised indigenous groups and others, primarily Afro-Latinos, to pursue cultural, political and economic equality in nations refounded on an anti-colonial basis.

Intercultural praxis is particularly strong in the Andean-Amazonian region, and the recent constitutions in Ecuador and Bolivia use the term extensively; it appears 23 times in the Ecuadorian constitution and 27 times in the Bolivian. Interculturality is envisioned as a new approach to a decolonised national refoundation in which the indigenous peoples would serve as a socio-political-cultural agent in a new attempt to achieve national sovereignty, a task that the colonial creole elites have never accomplished. In fact, these elites rarely tried to achieve such sovereignty because their interests have been closely identified with those of their European and North American counterparts. Upon achieving nominal political independence in the nineteenth century, the victorious creole elites proceeded to treat the indigenous people as poorly, or worse, than the Spaniards had done. Thus, it is necessary to refound the nation on an anti-colonial and intercultural basis that will provide cultural, economic and political equality and diversity in a vision that includes ecosystems as well as human cultures. In that sense, the planet has been intercultural forever, and if it is to prosper, ecosystems always have to be given a privileged place in socio-economic-political-cultural debates. No easy task, as the conflictive processes in Bolivia and Ecuador clearly demonstrate.

Throughout his extensive work, Tubino frequently defines the intercultural in terms of what it is not and should not be as well as what it should be:
It should not be equated with folklore, as is often the case in intercultural bilingual education programs located primarily in rural, indigenous regions of Peru.

It is opposed to the traditional acculturation in which indigenous people were to use Spanish and adhere to Western cultural norms.

It is distinguished from multiculturalism. Tubino describes multiculturalism as **affirmative** action – mutual respect and tolerance – and interculturalism as **transformative** action that goes beyond respect and tolerance and toward a dialogue intended to achieve cultural, economic and political equality with cultural diversity.

He distinguishes a ‘functional’ neoliberal interculturality, rather similar to mainstream intercultural communication and intercultural competence in the US, approaches which do not challenge social hierarchies and a critical, transformative interculturality that does.

He does not think interculturality should be left to the educational system. Rather, he regards it as a matter of state policy in all fields and argues that interculturality is a necessary form of a political ethic, and therefore a political praxis. (As is made clear in this article in relation to Peru, he points to the gap between intercultural rhetoric and claims, on one hand, and monocultural State practices on the other)

Such an ethic and praxis requires interculturality for all and not just for the rural indigenous populations; as such it should be the basis of a new postmodern variegated national identity rather than the colonial national identity founded on a fictive inclusive mestizo culture in which Indigenous people have been marginalised socially and treated culturally as folklore.

Such statements of ‘interculturality for all’ are common among Latin American interculturalists, and that goal presents a formidable problem because it would require that in some peaceful way (Tubino has no tolerance for violence) the hegemony of the elites and their identification with metropolitan elites could be superseded.

Tubino borrows the sociolinguistic term diglossia to discuss ‘cultural diglossia’ in situations in which two sets of cultural practices exist (e.g. mestizo and indigenous in Peru) in an asymmetric way, with the mestizo culture considered ‘higher’, more prestigious and desirable than the Indian cultures. The goal of critical interculturality is to turn this diglossia into diverse, multicultural egalitarian democracy, something that is not possible in the confines of Western liberal, representative democracy.

Likewise the intercultural decolonial path to nation formation cannot follow the Western model in which a core ethnie and socio-economic elites were necessarily hegemonic. In countries like Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador this model has only produced national disunity and continued exploitation and repression of the various indigenous, aboriginal cultural groups.
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Our countries are pluralistic, multilingual, multicultural societies, and they need governments that acknowledge the pluralism embedded in the ethos of its people. In Latin America, interculturality is perceived as the pursuit of a new societal model, one that is radically democratic and that requires a new type of national state. This paper is divided into three parts. In the first part, I analyse the origins of the Latin American discourse on interculturality. In the second part, I evaluate official intercultural discourses and practices, demonstrating their functionalist role in our monocultural states. In the final part, I suggest some approaches to ways in which intercultural discourse and practices can be changed so that interculturality does not lose its capacity for creating new modes of living together.

Keywords: Interculturalism; Interculturalidad; Cultural Diversity; Latin America Multiculturalism; Indigeneity

Introduction

Currently interculturality is promoted by many Latin American Nation States. This arrangement is a strange one because nation-states have always made the creation of a homogenous national identity through so-called ‘policies of national construction’ an essential task for it to carry out, and homogenising educational practices transmitted through public education stand out among these policies. Since its origins as an institution, the nation-state has assumed the role of making subordinate cultures conform to the cultural and linguistic model of the hegemonic nationality. Therefore, it is paradoxical that currently nation-states pursue interculturality. I think this occurrence has both positive and negative aspects. In Peru, for example, the state has incorporated intercultural language in the Constitution. This step is doubtless a highly positive one. On the negative side, matters related to interculturality and multilingualism are regarded as exclusively the domain of the educational sector. Interculturality is not perceived to be a problem of state for two reasons. First, precisely because it questions the existing model of the nation-state; thus it is an
important topic at the discourse level, but insignificant at the level of state action. Second, because interculturality as an ethical-political proposal is a matter that concerns all sectors of the state and not just education.

Interculturality requires a new model of the national state. Thus, the real issue is not one of finding ways to decentralise the current homogenising nation-state by extending social coverage and making the state more efficient. Before raising these questions, we have to ask ourselves if the kind of state we have is the kind of state we need and the kind of state we want. Our countries are deeply pluricultural and multilingual. They need states that correspond to that reality, states that respect diversity, states rooted in that reality, that is, multinational states. Only on the basis of multinational nation-states will interculturality really become state policy.

In the Peruvian case, in 2003 interculturality was legally elevated to the status of a guiding principle for all levels of educational practice. But thus far this measure seems more like a discursive concession than a legal obligation, since it is not reflected in new policies in the educational field nor in the budgetary allocations for Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE).

We believe that the moment has arrived to ask ourselves seriously: what is Latin American interculturality gaining and losing by becoming part of official state discourse? Do socially critical discourses tend to become functional and technical when they are incorporated into the state apparatus? Is that what is happening to intercultural discourse and practice? What should we do so that intercultural concepts and practices gain ground in official discourse without losing their critical and liberating potential? Can official discourse be functional and critical at the same time? Why do proposed discourses and practices lose their creative and critical capacity when they become institutionalised discourses and practices? What happens to intercultural discourses and practices when they have ceased being proposals and have become institutionalised discourses and practices?3

To keep institutionalised discourses and practices from losing the critical and liberating potential that brought them into being, they must be permanently re-institutionalized, that is, they must be remade and recreated from the perspective of new discourses and practices. In Latin American interculturalism, the interculturalism institutionalised by the state is treated in an instrumental and technical fashion in a way strips it of its liberating mission. In the official intercultural discourses, issues of interculturality and bilingualism are not seen as public, that is, political matters, thus eliminating the political and liberating goals of interculturality by reducing it to a technical educational matter. This educational dimension surely must be developed, but it is not the only, or even the most important factor.

I have divided this presentation into three parts. First, I analyse the origins of Latin American intercultural discourse at the moment when it was proposed as a break from the assimilationist education of the nation-state and as an alternative to bilingual bicultural education for indigenous people. Second, I analyse what has happened to intercultural discourses and practices now that they have become institutionalised. Everything indicates that when alternative discourses and practices
become official policy, they tend to lose their creative and critical potential and become technical-functionalist. In this part, we focus on an analysis of the Peruvian case. Third, I try to sketch some ways of reorienting intercultural discourse and practices so that they do not lose the liberating political potential they possess as social critique and maintain their creative capacity for generating new forms of living together (convivencia).

The Double Discourse of Institutionalised Interculturalism

Recently, in Peru, there have been important formal advances in the approach to interculturality and multilingualism at the legal level. Article 2, paragraph 19 of the Political Constitution of 1993 affirms that ‘The State recognises and protects the ethnic and cultural plurality of the nation’; Article 17 recognises that the state ‘foments intercultural bilingual education according to the characteristics of each area’; and article 20 of the General Education Law 208844 of 2003 affirms that ‘Intercultural Bilingual Education is offered throughout the educational system’.

Nevertheless, these legal formulations are not reflected in substantive changes or in observable results in concrete educational practices. This has led me to suspect that perhaps what is happening is not just another disparity between theory and practice. Perhaps, it is the case that when interculturality ceases to be a critical discourse, it provokes a fissure between the official manifest discourse and the logic of practice.

The manifest discourse includes norms and principles. It is axiological formal juridical discourse; it is prescriptive discourse. Prescriptive discourse is a normative discourse that should have an impact on reality. It is a discourse that is only legitimate if it is capable of generating practical changes in a predetermined axiological direction. But a prescriptive discourse that does not have an impact on reality is a sterile, empty and lifeless discourse. Or perhaps it is an ideology, I am not sure. But it definitely is an abstract discourse that makes the real invisible; or, more exactly, it is a discourse that presents the real upside down, like a camera obscura.

The logic of practice is not the logic of the norm. It makes clear the real intentions and motivations of agents. It is the language of the concrete. ‘Policies’ become evident in unseen discourse, that is, in the logic of practice, not in the logic of norms. The practice of IBE in Peru is an exclusionary practice that is limited to indigenous peasant communities in the most remote rural areas of the country. It is a practice that dismisses the urban as meaningless. In this way, the serious intercultural conflicts generated in the urban spaces of big cities by migrations from the countryside are systematically ignored.

Besides, it is a practice that is limited to primary education. In spite of legal formulas and rhetorical concessions, the IBE is a specific modality only for rural primary education; it is not included in programmes of secondary education and even less so in higher education. Therefore, the knowledge and skills obtained in primary IBE are not developed further and are lost in the ethnocentric monolingual
secondary education that is for all students. This means that, although on the surface, that is, at the discursive level, IBE has opted against a transitional model in favour of a maintenance model, in practice it has opted for a transitional model and against a maintenance model.

From Biculturality to Interculturality in Latin America

Interculturality entered Latin America in the 1970s as a critique of official educational policy and as an alternative to bicultural bilingual education, and, during that decade, IBE was presented for the first time as a necessity for the indigenous peoples of the continent for conceptual, rather than strategic reasons.

In general, biculturalism may be understood as the ability to function in two cultural settings in equal and simultaneous ways. This ability, however, turned out to be inappropriate for indigenous education for fundamental reasons. First of all, the use of biculturalism in indigenous education means that the asymmetrical relations of power and prestige between indigenous and national languages are ignored: ‘The term “bicultural” refers to a relation of cultures of high and low social prestige in a given context in which only one form of cultural and linguistic expression is acceptable’ (Aikam 2002: 52). Besides, according to the concept of biculturality, emphasis is placed on the inclusion of the aboriginal language alongside the “official” language and culture throughout the educational process (Aikam 2002). In contrast, according to the concept of interculturality, emphasis is placed on communication and contact, on the relations between the two languages, and especially the two cultures.

The concept of biculturality was rapidly losing ground because it turned out to be theoretically unsustainable and practically unworkable. Learning a culture is more complex than learning a language. Through cultural contacts a process of hybridisation is begun through which the identities of the people involved are modified. The idea that people can be educated in a way that allows them to move from one culture to another as though they were parallel synchronic entities is a theoretical error that leads to misguided and irrelevant pedagogical practices.

In a meeting organised by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1983 that addressed the Master Plan for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, it was first decided that in Latin America there was a consensus in favour of substituting the concept of ‘intercultural education’ for ‘bilingual education’. Esteban Monsonyi was the first one to explain this change clearly. He said:

Let’s not talk about bilingual education because indigenous education will continue to be a separate entity, and the indigenous cultures will be expanded in consonance with new economic, social, and political needs and circumstances. Human beings are capable of handling several languages and cultural expressions simultaneously. Nevertheless, it is preferable that this multifaceted heritage be inserted harmoniously — that is, without contradictions — in the authentic cultural framework of
the culture one inherits and which continues to be perfectly capable of dealing with the historical weight of the human crossroads at which we live [...]. (Monsonyi and Rengifo 1983: 209–30)

I would like to stress two ideas in this approach. First, according to it, cultures begin to be understood as diachronic processes that develop in time rather than as static synchronic structures. Cultures are not what they are, but rather what they become; they do not possess a timeless essence that must be ‘saved’ from external influences. They are temporal, changing, realities in process; change is their essence. From this point of view, there is no reason to propose the conservation of languages and cultures as the ideal of IBE. Cultures are conserved through change. Cultural conservationism presupposes non-existent timeless essences. However, intercultural education proposes the improvement of the exchanges and the symmetry of contacts rather than a return to an idealised past or an abstract cultural essence.

In IBE, however, teachers frequently associate the activities and content of the intercultural component of the curriculum with the promotion of the participants’ ‘original culture’:

This approach (thinking that the objective of IBE is the validation and of the native culture and the recognition of its worth) contains the risk of generating a cultural withdrawal that leads to an insistence on recovering what has been lost of the ancestral culture and a denial of the cultural changes that occur normally through contact with other cultures. (Monsonyi and Rengito 1983: 19)

This essentialist conception of culture that underlies the *indigenismo* of classic IBE ignores that:

one’s own identity, the identity of a community, is formed by a diversity of forms and conceptions that come from inside and from outside the group. A group’s identity is shaped heterogeneously. And the most intimate aspects of a culture may have various origins. (Heise *et al.* 1992: 13)

Second, from this point of view, IBE should not have as its goal the conservation of the essence of aboriginal cultures. Cultural identities are and will be heterogeneous. External influences are and should be welcome. The important thing is preparing subjects from the subaltern cultures to challenge the hegemonic cultures actively rather than limiting themselves to passive assimilation. According to Monsonyi, intercultural education must prepare members of Amerindian cultures to take active roles in dealing with their own cultures and with external cultures and to decide what they want to be from the perspective of their own cultural frameworks. In this way, and only in this way, can members of subaltern cultures construct harmonious identities in a way that is authentic and critically autonomous. To distinguish itself from biculturalism, the essence of intercultural education for the indigenous peoples of our continent should be as follows:
All cultures should preserve their own personality and be in reciprocal, open, and permanent contact with others, engaging in a productive dialog under equal conditions. The national majority culture, which is also incomplete, dependent, and divided regionally, cannot and should not establish the guidelines for reducing all the rich and creative variations of indigenous cultures to a vague uniformity and a homogenized stereotype. (Monsoyi and Rengifo 1983: 212)

Here are two ideas central to interculturalism that must be emphasised and analyzed:

The first idea stipulates that the strengthening of indigenous ethnic cultural identity must be achieved through dialogue rather than as a necessary precondition for that dialog. Cultural identities are not entities that pre-exist intercultural relations; rather, they are relational identities. Identity is a self-conception that is always constructed in relation to an Other rather than a self-contained entity that is independent of otherness and outside of socialising processes: ‘Socialization is not a simple sum of elements that are external to a static psyche; rather, its effects are inextricably woven into the psyche as it exists in reality’ (Castoriades 1998: 314). From this point of view, interculturality is a way of understanding and reconstructing processes of socialization that are produced in asymmetrical multicultural contexts.

In post-colonial societies such as ours, the socialisation processes of those who belong to subaltern cultures tend to become processes of forced cultural assimilation. In these contexts, schools easily become structured scenarios in which what is indigenous is passively abandoned and what is white-mestizo is uncritically assimilated. According to intercultural education, schools should stop being like that and should be transformed into spaces of social deliberation that promote the autonomous elaboration of cultural identities. Even cultural dissidence is a viable option as long as it occurs naturally and is not evoked through subliminal or explicit coercion.

The second key idea refers to the ways in which intercultural education should question the terms of the relation between the national majority culture and the subaltern indigenous cultures. The national majority languages and cultures tend to be the ‘norm’ through which cultural uniformity is enforced. From the perspective of self-described intercultural education, that homogenising approach should be neutralised to make room for education based on ‘rich and differentiated varieties’ with ‘original and creative guidelines’. This approach has frequently been interpreted as making room for traditional oral tales and the expressions of local folklore. It is necessary, however, to recognise that IBE is more than the dissemination of folklore and the recognition of its value. Latin American intercultural education proposes the strengthening of the cultural identity of the indigenous peoples, not so that they become wrapped in their own traditions and sell their folklore better, but rather so that, from their own perspective, they engage critically and selectively with the external world so as to produce symmetrical conditions for reciprocal interactions and exchanges.
Official IBE is not anti-discriminatory education because it does not approach interculturality from the perspective of the perpetrators of discrimination, but rather from the perspective of those who are its victims, not from the perspective of those who discriminate, but from the perspective of those who suffer discrimination. This exclusion is an unfortunate consequence of the indigenista bias that continues to exist. When it is finally realised that discrimination involves two parties, that there are victims of discrimination because there are perpetrators of discrimination, then the need to bring interculturality also to those who discriminate will become clear; in these cases, intercultural education will need to conceive of itself as basically anti-discriminatory education.

**Interculturality as Official Discourse: The Peruvian Case**

The official discourse and practice of the IBE in Peru is a decontextualized discourse and practice that does not address the communities’ demands and practices.

Official intercultural discourse has a markedly axiological and linguistic bias. For teachers, interculturality is presented not as a really existing situation nor as a possible utopia, but as an abstract duty, an unfeasible utopia. The problem is not that an axiology is proposed, but rather that the axiology proposed is universal and abstract, valid for any group in any part of the world. Thus, for example, Juan Carlos Gondenzi, former director of IBE in the Ministry of Education, affirms that in Peru we educators:

> understand intercultural education as a pedagogical approach that, from a given situation ‘x’, tries to achieve a meta-situation ‘y’, in which the meta-situation ‘y’, is a climate of pedagogical and equal relations in which there is a critical and creative articulation of different knowledge systems and values. (Gondenzi 1996: 15)

This axiological vision of interculturality is one of an abstract universality that is not capable of being the foundation of the sort of contextualised educational practices that are required to meet the participants’ demands and needs. We cannot forget that the recipients of the official IBE are indigenous peoples who live in remote rural areas where extreme poverty exists. IBE cannot and should not continue to minimise the importance of these conditions or the expectations that such conditions create. Currently, however, the intercultural discourse of bilingual education is a culturalist discourse that does not take into consideration the political and socioeconomic conditions in the communities where the participants live.

In a 2004 survey of 270 teachers conducted by the National Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education regarding their perception of Peruvian society and the ways in which cultural diversity is handled in it, the following question was asked:

According to your understanding of the relations among cultures, Peru is seen as:

(a) A country is which cultural differences are promoted but the relations among cultures are not.
(b) A country in which cultural differences are promoted in a homogeneous climate of dialog and cultural exchange.
(c) A country in which Western culture is prioritized and the other cultures are totally ignored.
(d) A country that does not have its own culture, but rather creates one on the basis of foreign cultures.

Answer ‘b’, the one that is farthest from reality, received the greatest number of positive responses (103) followed by answer ‘a’ (68). Why did IBE teachers opt for this answer? I do not think it is because they believe that Peruvian society is one in which intercultural dialogue takes place in an equitable way. Moreover, if they thought that to be the case, IBE would not be necessary, and that would be absurd. The most probable explanation is that they chose answer ‘b’ because they thought it was the one that was expected. But then, why do IBE teachers think that the state expects that response from them? Our hypothesis is that they know that the official discourse of interculturality and bilingual education is an uncritical culturalist one that is devoid of political and socioeconomic content. That thesis is confirmed by the following question:

A curricular proposal with an intercultural focus should consider the following guidelines:

(a) Preservation of native languages.
(b) The promotion of native cultures and the strengthening of cultural identities.
(c) Overcoming racism and social exclusion.
(d) The promotion of quality equal education in rural areas.

The preferred answers were ‘a’ and ‘b’. Once again, the linguistic and cultural aspects evoked far more positive responses than the political and social aspects of IBE. Intercultural dialog, however, presupposes certain political and social conditions, without which it is no more than a parody of dialogue and a palliative for social ills.

Today, we know that intercultural dialogue presupposes the creation of the conditions needed to make it possible, namely, symmetrical and equal relations that do not currently exist among languages and cultures:

[Therefore] dialog should not be the starting point. The first question to be addressed should be the conditions under which that dialog will take place. Or, more precisely, it must be demanded that the cultural dialog immediately take into account the economic, political, military, and other factors that have an impact on any frank dialog among cultures. Today this demand is essential if we are not to fall into the trap of a decontextualized dialog that would only favour the interests of the dominant civilization since it would ignore the asymmetrical power relations that currently prevail in the world. (Fornet 2000: 12)

Thus, rather than beginning from an abstract universal axiology – using fixed pedagogic strategies and practices – with the intention of making that dialogue ‘fit’ in reality,
we must begin from reality, using it as a starting point for an intercultural dialogue with the communities involved in IBE, thereby remaking that reality culturally and socially. It is absurd to think that the state can impose intercultural discourse and practices. Interculturality is produced through dialogue, intercultural dialogue. It cannot and should not be a proposal made without consulting the indigenous communities.

The Official IBE Discourse and Practices Are not Inclusive of the Existing Cultural Diversity Since it still Has a Strong Indigenista Bias

Official IBE discourse assumes that such education can contribute to promoting equality by first strengthening the language and the cultural identity of those groups in our society that have been excluded socially and discriminated against culturally. According to these educators, a critical approach to the external world should come after the ethnic identities have been strengthened. Indigenous identities should be fortified so that they may subsequently proceed to choose critically what is best for them without being passively assimilated into the surrounding culture. This strategy obviously goes against the very idea of intercultural education accurately and clearly proposed by Esteban Monsonyi at the beginning of the movement.

In practice, IBE programmes tend to stay at the first stage, that is, at the moment of strengthening indigenous languages and ethnic identities, but with a strong linguistic bias. They presume that ethnic identities are strengthened through learning indigenous languages. In practice, this approach makes IBE substantively bilingual and only secondarily intercultural.

But then, Zavala and Córdova (2003) ask, what happens to the term IBE?

When bilingual is prioritised over intercultural, the relation between what is bilingual and what is intercultural loses its coherence. It is as though the bilingual component ceased having a cultural base and the intercultural component was only a peripheral matter that may or may not be taken into account. As a consequence, bilingual, but not necessarily intercultural, education is developed. That is, there is education in two languages in which the intercultural element tends to fall by the wayside. (Zavala and Córdova 2003: 16)

In that way, the critical approach to the external world, and the symmetrical and creative exchange that makes the approach intercultural, loses relevancy, and teachers do not know exactly what to do in the classroom. It is not even clear what intercultural competencies mean and, thus – with the exception of integral communication – when teachers are called on to develop the intercultural component in various areas, they only reproduce local folklore.

The Depoliticization of Official IBE

In the classroom, the ‘intercultural component’ is frequently limited to the gathering and appreciation of indigenous cultural expressions – songs, dances, stories, riddles – without recognising the importance of the ‘hard nucleus’ of the culture that is the
source of those unique expressions, namely, the underlying poetic cosmovision and
the implicit philosophy they express. In a pejorative tone, we call this warped vision
of indigenous knowledge the ‘folklorisation of IBE’.

What causes this trivialization of our cultures precisely at the site where their
depth, wisdom, and worth should be recognized? ‘Experience shows that a
programme centred exclusively on the linguistic aspect is an impediment to
overcoming the folkloric vision that has characterised interculturality’ (Trapnell
and Neira 2004: 29). This does not mean that work on indigenous languages in IBE is
tangential to the pertinent sociocultural contexts. Rather, ‘What we want to
emphasise is the danger associated with a widely held belief that holds that whenever
the indigenous language is used, even in a translation of fragments of textbooks, that
that is intercultural education’ (Trapnell and Neira 2004: 29). This is an important,
but not the most important reason for the folklorization of classic IBE. We believe
that the uncritical essentialism at the base of the indigenista conception of aboriginal
cultures in IBE favours the trivialization of our cultures and the reduction of them to
their most superficial aspects.

What is happening in IBE is something similar to what occurred in multicultural
education in the Anglo-American world in the 1980s and 1990s:

[...] in which there was a tendency to teach the colourful and exotic elements of
other cultures [...] . It is not necessary to state that this tendency was quickly
criticized for trivializing and depoliticizing immigrant cultures and identities [...].
This tendency avoided the need to confront the reality that the members of
different cultures not only eat and dress differently, but they also may have
fundamentally different and opposing ideas regarding God, the family, the State,
the earth, society and basic moral and political obligations. (Kymlicka 2003: 64)

Folklorization is banalization, trivialization, and the reduction of a culture to its
external expressions. Unlike Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism that trivialises cultures
that come from elsewhere, classic IBE – by folklorizing indigenous cultures – would
be trivialising cultures that are within.

_Perspectives for the Future_

Although at the beginning intercultural education was proposed exclusively for
indigenous peoples, we now know that it should not be just for them. If what we want
to combat is discrimination, we need intercultural education not just for those who
are the victims of discrimination, but also for the perpetrators of discrimination,
because discrimination is a relation between the two parties. Furthermore, there is no
reason to restrict IBE to rural areas. IBE in cities and marginal urban areas are the new
challenge for interculturality on the continent. In this regard, in some countries – as is
the case in Mexico, for example – important experiences have been initiated.

Finally, the access of new generations of indigenous peoples to higher education is
a generalised phenomenon throughout the continent. With that in mind, indigenous
and intercultural universities have been created with the goal of responding to the social demands of the regions in which there is a majority indigenous population. In other words, IBE is being proposed not only ‘for all’, but also at ‘every stage of life’, with a special emphasis on all that pertains to higher education.

**Interculturality is not Multiculturalism**

In Latin America, there is a distinction made between interculturality and multiculturalism, and, on the basis of that distinction, interculturality is generally preferred. For multiculturalism the keyword is tolerance, for interculturality it is dialogue and the recognition of the value of difference. Multiculturalism seeks to avoid confrontation, but it does not lead to integration. Instead, it leads to parallel societies. Interculturality seeks to produce relations based on equality and on the basis of the recognition of the value of differences. The goal of intercultural education is the improvement of the quality of life for all in a culturally diverse community, something that goes beyond mere tolerance.

**Intercultural Policies are Intended to Promote Transformative Action, Multicultural Policies Promote Affirmative Action**

Where multiculturalism aims to produce and produces parallel societies, interculturality seeks to produce integrated societies with symmetrical relations among different cultures. Multicultural policies avoid cultural confrontations (*desencuentros*). Intercultural policies promote the meeting (*encuentro*) of cultures. Multiculturalism promotes tolerance, interculturalism dialog. Multiculturalism does not eradicate prejudices and negative stereotypes that contaminate relations between different cultures. Interculturality seeks the eradication of the prejudices that are the basis of social stigmatisation and cultural discrimination. Multicultural policies are affirmative action, intercultural policies are transformative action. They seek to turn negative intercultural relations into positive ones. In the long run, intercultural policies aim to transform the symbolic structures on which the social relations among different cultures are constructed. They may be complemented by multicultural affirmative action policies and compensatory education, but such policies may never take their place.

Finally, one would have to say that interculturality as an ethical–political policy involves new ways of understanding and practicing citizenship. There is not one, but rather many ways to be a citizen in a genuinely multicultural democracy. Therefore, public education should fundamentally be intercultural education for all, an education to become a good citizen.

**Interculturality is Only Possible When It is State Policy**

Interculturality should be introduced in every sector of society so that it can be possible in education. It is not just an educational matter, but rather it involves every
aspect of the state. The responsibility for integrating indigenous languages and cultures in the educational process should not be left only to public education. Interculturality is a matter of state that involves all sectors because it is a societal project.

It is not an anti-modern project. We should not confuse interculturality with a nostalgic call for a return to an idealised past that never existed (the primitive utopia) nor with a Manichean total rejection of Western modernity. What it rejects in modernization is its homogenising Western bias. What is at stake, then, is the possibility of recreating modernity based on multiple traditions.

Faced with a uniformalizing (and basically Western) modernity, ‘it is possible to imagine a diverse and pluralistic modernity, one that is richer, that explores many alternatives while juxtaposing them in the new and rapid space of communications’ (Zuniga and Ansión 1997: 19). By choosing interculturality as an ethical–political project, we elect to construct truly multicultural states and genuinely intercultural forms of citizenship.

Under the current conditions of the homogeneous nation-state, it is not possible to practice interculturality. To choose interculturality is to choose an alternative model for a state that can be a framework for promoting more just and dignified forms of living together with others.

Notes


[3] I have taken the concept of the difference between the logic of what is institutionalised and the proposals of the social imagination from Castoriades (1999).

[4] At the most general level, the term indicates a concern for indigenous cultures. In this article, it refers to white-mestizo concepts and practices that have traditionally treated indigenous cultures in a folkloric fashion and do not address issues of racism [This is a note added by John H. Sinnigen].

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