

QuaMMELOT



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Critical Intercultural Education: Promises and Challenges

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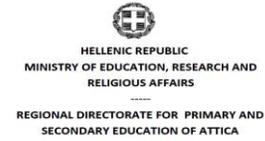
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QuaMMELOT



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DIPARTIMENTO DI FORMAZIONE,
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Four main areas

The QUAMMELOT project has been an excellent opportunity to design, develop and evaluate an online training proposal on intercultural education, aimed at secondary education teachers.

Our project has potential implications in these four main areas:

- (a) education policies,
- b) teacher training,
- c) educational and curricular practices of schools (in secondary education and, by analogy, in other educational stages before and after the secondary stage),
- (d) social and community education outside schools.

My presentation

My presentation does not aim to discuss the approaches, methodologies or training processes of the project, but to raise some reflections on the critical dimension of intercultural education. In other words, I propose to look to the future, presenting some challenges to which intercultural education based on a critical perspective should pay attention in the coming years. This implies considering not only schools (this has been the main objective of the QUAMMELOT project) but the entire social system, including the political, economic and community frameworks of our current globalised, interdependent and unequal world.

Three perspectives

It is common to differentiate three theoretical and practical perspectives on cultural diversity: assimilationism, multiculturalism and interculturalism (Besalú, 2002).

1) Assimilationism considers cultural diversity as a problem and an obstacle, which it tries to solve by nullifying the differences. This perspective conceives the cultural difference as a deficit.

2) Multiculturalism is defined based on the priority given to the group to which it belongs, the spatialisation of differences, the recognition of cultural relativism and the expression of differences in public space. Taken to its extreme, multiculturalism leads to social and educational fragmentation.

3) Interculturalism

3) Interculturalism, on the other hand, is based on respect, equality and tolerance; it has as its objectives "the recognition of cultural pluralism and respect for the identity of each culture; and the construction of plural, but cohesive and democratic society" (Besalú, 2002, 65).

Interculturalism assumes the values of democracy and individual autonomy, seeks the convergence between personal freedom and group loyalty, promotes a minimum of political and cultural cohesion, and favours cultural mediation processes (linguistic interpretation, cultural interpretation and translation, advice to professionals and users) (Demetrio and Favaro, 2004; Gimeno, 2001). Interculturalism is undoubtedly the approach that has been at the basis of the QUAMMELOT project.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE QUAMMELOT PROJECT FOR CRITICAL INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

I think that the Quammelot project has made some significant contributions, in the perspective of optimising the social and educational inclusion of immigrant students and suggesting an innovative and reflective model to promote and manage intercultural diversity, all in a context of transnational networking:

- A) TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION
- B) INNOVATION IN FORMAL EDUCATION
- C) VOICES AND EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATIONAL ACTORS
- D) NARRATIVE AND EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH
- E) EPISTEMOLOGICAL QUESTIONING

a) Transnational cooperation

Quammelot has sought to respond to the EU's objective of supporting the educational inclusion of migrant pupils and unaccompanied foreign minors by developing links and working relationships between academic and non-academic partners, such as universities, regional education authorities, municipalities and associations. This project has shown a successful way of working together in a renewed Europe, addressing migration and diversity from an inclusive and cooperative perspective. This project has global and cross-cutting implications, both for Europe and for other geographical areas.

b) Innovation in formal education

The project has developed methodologies and tools to empower secondary education institutions to respond more flexibly to the specific teaching and learning needs of migrant students. On the other hand, our focus on online teacher training represents an original contribution to promote a field of training and academic support that is not very well developed.

c) To make visible and take into account the voices and experiences of the educational actors

We believe that innovative educational policies and practices will have a better chance of working if the educational actors who are involved in everyday life in local communities and schools are listened to, paying attention to their experiences, expectations and needs. In our project, this has involved the development of focus groups with different educational actors, including teachers, managers, social work and mediation professionals, immigrant families and associations.

d) Narrative and experiential approach

Narrative approaches are making exciting contributions to the construction of current intercultural education approaches. The use of narrative, artistic and multimodal methodologies was central to our training of secondary school teachers, who applied these approaches with their students. These methodologies have become a vital tool for institutions, programmes and managers to create, promote, legitimise and communicate processes related to innovation, research and training, in both formal and community educational contexts.

e) Epistemological questioning

We need to question the kind of knowledge and intervention that is developing in Europe on migration, diversity and interculturality. The political, ideological and epistemological critique of knowledge is a challenge that we face when we carry out research and intervention on social issues that have a strong ideological and political charge. Our project addressed some of these challenges critically while trying to be useful for improving European educational policies and contributing to better learning opportunities.

CRITICAL APPROACHES IN EDUCATION:

- Little attention has been paid to the connection between intercultural education and critical theory.
- The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School align themselves with Marx in denouncing the injustice, inequality and domination present in advanced capitalist societies.
- The aim has been to constitute a critical theory of human society as a whole, and in particular of advanced industrial society, to stimulate a social transformation based on freedom, equality and cooperation. These ideas presuppose the (utopian) aspiration to the suppression of an oppressive and unequal social system.
- Kemmis (1993) has proposed the concept of "critical teacher communities" to account for group processes carried out by teachers to reflect on and improve educational practice. Freire (1985) proposed a model of education that was liberating, critical and popular. Giroux (1988) has criticised the inadequacies of the theories of social reproduction and has emphasised the alternative possibilities contained in the theories of production, dealing mainly with the role of teachers as transformative intellectuals.

SIX ISSUES

Some of the problems usually silenced or neglected in current approaches to intercultural education are precisely some of the conflicting issues that are having a significant development recently and currently, including a strong media and social network impact:

1

Social and economic inequalities.

Neo-liberal capitalism has deepened and widened the inequality gap significantly. The wealthiest 1% of the world has more wealth than the rest of the world's population. Many economists consider inequality to be the most significant economic problem of our time. Critical intercultural education should be able to raise alternatives to this situation, by situating migrations and inequity on a global scale and offering suggestions for reflectively working on these issues.

2

Racism and ethnic discrimination.

As has happened with the feminist movement and the criticism of gender inequality, racism has become a problem that has become progressively more visible, particularly in the United States. Systemic and structural racism against the black population and other minorities is a violation of human rights and should be incompatible with democratic states. Migrant communities suffer from discriminatory and racist attitudes, which must be combated through critical training, both in and outside schools.

3

Colonialism and neo-colonialism and their painful legacies (slavery, economic exploitation, war and violence) Criticism of coloniality.

- Decolonial perspectives: Radical questioning and the search for the overcoming of the most distinctive forms of oppression perpetrated by modernity/coloniality against lower classes and social groups, especially in the regions colonised and neo-colonised by the Euro-American metropolises, about human existence, social and economic relations, thought and education.
- It is a concept marked by a constant search for autonomy, which can only be understood if one takes into account that decolonisation was built from the ruins, the wounds caused by the colonial situation.
- Therefore, the decolonial conception is born from the existential pain caused by the wounds of colonisation, from the denial of rights (including the most elementary ones, such as the right to life), from the submission of bodies and ways of thinking, from the prohibition of autonomous education.

4

Gender inequalities, including inequalities of immigrant/refugee girls and women.

The "Me too" movement and the progressive visibility in recent years of gender inequality (labour, political, family, gender-based violence, abuse, trafficking in women and mafias controlling the prostitution business, etc.) is being a significant factor in the development of "racialised" feminist versions focusing on vulnerable and unequal minorities, such as immigrant/refugee girls and women. This context opens up interesting possibilities for including the gender perspective (including the fight against gender-based violence) within critical intercultural education.

5

Historical memory, the teaching of history and the construction of "others", concerning the representation and interpretation of migration, refugees, ethnicity, racial problems and cultural diversity.

In the face of nationalist and conservative readings of past and recent history, it is necessary to include these debates in formal education, to deepen a critical understanding of the past and historical memory, analysing the different versions in dispute and the arguments that are constructed, disseminated and legitimised.

6

The cultural and educational implications of the radical right-wing political movements of neoconservatism, populism, neo-fascism and illiberal democracy.

A critical intercultural approach has essential "political" implications since it must be given the task of combating neoconservative political movements that are contrary to human rights and that spread homophobic, discriminatory, sexist, xenophobic and ultra-nationalist views. Immigrants and women are often two groups that suffer from the political discourses and practices of this extreme right-wing identity (see the cases of the United States, Brazil, Hungary and Poland, among others).

[The terms: extreme right, traditional extreme right, post-industrial extreme right, new extreme right, radical right, populist right, identity right, (ultra)nationalist right, right of cultural racism/differentialist racism/ethnicism/ethnocracy, neo-liberal neo-fascism, post-fascism, defenders of non-liberal or illiberal democracy].

Final note:

It is sad to note that most of the calls for European projects involve only partners from European Union countries or countries that have initiated processes for their integration. Within the scope of the Quammelot project, it would have been a great asset to have been able to count on the participation of entities from the countries of origin of the main immigrant communities in Europe. This participation seems necessary for overcoming the potential risks of European ethnocentrism and the temptations of a biased or incomplete vision of the processes of diversity, in a decolonial, dialogical and democratic perspective.

THANK YOU!

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