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MIRROR: A CRITIQUE FROM THE
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Laura A. Valdiviezo



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Chapter

INTERCULTURALITY AGAINST THE MIRROR: A CRITIQUE FROM THE PERUVIAN EXPERIENCE

*Laura Alicia Valdiviezo**

College of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, US

ABSTRACT

Global initiatives promoting cultural pluralism and education access for Indigenous and minoritized populations in the world have helped define education policy in countries like Peru for decades. Intercultural bilingual education (IBE) constitutes part of national policy in different Andean countries with diverse implementation experiences. IBE defines cultural pluralism and education for Indigenous populations as a response to the need of furthering access to quality education using Indigenous languages, knowledges and cultural practices. This chapter builds on the experiences of intercultural education in Peru as interculturality becomes defined in Peruvian law and its subsequent implementation in Indigenous schools. The aim of this chapter is on analyzing IBE not only as pedagogic alternative for Indigenous communities, but also as an approach that considers the pedagogical and political implications of intercultural education beyond the Indigenous setting. The discussion centers on the critique of top down initiatives that attempt to tend to Indigenous sectors but leave major inequity issues still unaddressed in Peruvian society.

1. INTRODUCTION

The last decades have been characterized by the proliferation of discourse and policies focused on plurilingual and intercultural education, which promote existing linguistic,

* Corresponding Author's E-mail: lav@educ.umass.edu.

ethnic and cultural diversity as sources of national wealth across nations (López and Küper, 2002; UNESCO, 2008). Even though the discourse that promotes diversity is not static but rather tends to articulate particular national issues, one consistent feature present in policy discourse in different countries is its focus on the recognition and appreciation of diversity as national resource and foundation for democracy. Although complex and filled with contradiction, it is possible to sustain that this move to value diversity reflects a paradigmatic shift that promotes affirmative attention to diversity and helps challenge the *status quo* that sustains grave social, economic and political inequalities across contexts. More recently, however, we are witnessing that this proposed recognition of diversity as foundation for democratic life is encountering increasing ideological and political radicalization of discourse in governments and societies across the globe.

While in the present times, discriminatory and essentialist ideologies arguably are gaining momentum, it is important to understand that these ideologies are by no means new. The use of a historical lens may prove helpful to explain how the project of development of the nation-state created ideals of national identity through the systematic manipulation of rhetoric against linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity by defining them as obstacles for the national unity and progress of a country (see predominant discourse of the nation-state in the emergent nations since the nineteenth century, and additional respective analyses in Habermas, 2007; Tölölyan, 1991). Homogenizing discourses, similar to those of the late nineteenth up to mid-twentieth centuries, which gave a racial and ethnic rationale for the emergence of new nations, are now casting additional stigma and justification for divisiveness characterized by essentialism, exceptionalism, and blatant rejection of the other. Such messages, which place blame on “others,” stereotyping them as a menace for privileged groups, are inundating the media. Perspectives centering on diversity as a source of social wealth and democracy are losing track in the current political and social climate.

Social justice and critical perspectives have emphasized the inclusion of diversity not only as critique but also as response to pervasive assimilation and homogenization ideologies utilized to justify an unequal economic and social order. The influence of these critical perspectives is evident in *de jure* policy language in countries like Peru, where for at least two decades intercultural education policy has defined the purpose of education for historically unattended populations to include and promote their cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. The implementation of intercultural education has faced many challenges. Most challenges are evident in the implementation of education in programs tending to Indigenous sectors -as I will explain below- but now what seems at risk is the imminent legalization and institutionalization of homogenizing ideologies that translate into policies that reinforce racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural exclusion. As we witness extreme ideological changes globally and we see how these clash with gains in equity and diversity initiatives thus far, we ask what is next for interculturality and education in the Peruvian context? We are not equipped to predict the future, but we can identify important

trends of ways in which intercultural education embraces diversity, challenges the status quo - together with any regime of power - and promotes transformation towards social justice.

In this chapter, I present three main points. First, discourse on interculturality and intercultural education in Peru while an important step taken by the national government, has been characterized by top down implementation with sectors identified as culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse - like Indigenous and Afro-Peruvian sectors (Valdiviezo, 2006). The sole location of interculturality within already minoritized groups detaches the inequities faced by these sectors from the rest of society, as if the rest of society had no connection, no role and thus no responsibility concerning societal inequity. Therefore, in spite of a change in discourse and some institutional efforts to address grave inequities, the implementation of intercultural education continues to minoritize the sectors is supposed to prioritize. As result, major inequity issues remain unaddressed in Peruvian society which demand the attention of not only government but of society in general to intercultural discourse as principle applicable to all societal life, not only to marginalized sectors. Second, education institutions are ill-prepared to challenge emerging essentialist rhetoric that fuels antagonistic relations between government institutions and minoritized peoples. It is important to look at interculturality against the mirror to understand the need to transform institutions and all sectors of society, not only policy discourse, to challenge inequality and injustice in order to promote change. My third point argues that attention to social practice in intercultural education as source of knowledge constitutes an important step towards challenging both rhetoric and ideologies of homogenization.

2. ROLE OF THE STATE AND INTERCULTURALITY FROM THE TOP DOWN

Parallel to the theoretical and political debates about diversity and multiculturalism (Alfaro et al., 2008; Apitsch, 2002; Taylor, 1992), institutions such as education ministries and governmental and non-governmental organizations, have stated their efforts to defend the protection of the linguistic and cultural rights of diverse populations facing marginalization, poverty and discrimination (UNESCO, 2008; World Conference on Linguistic Rights, 1996). Since the decade of 1990, the influence of these organizations has been crucial for the design of intercultural education policies and programs in countries around the world. In the Americas, the advancement of a new discourse on diversity as a resource and foundation of democratic nations has endured epistemological, philosophical and practical challenges that are sources of profound concern for many multiculturalists (Albó, 2002; Godenzzi, 1996, 1997, 2003; Kymlicka, 2001; López 1996, 1997; Taylor, 1992). With or without intercultural education, the relations of states with Indigenous,

Afro-Latin American and overall historically marginalized sectors may show the clearest examples of the unwillingness of governments to frame and enact upon the rights and self-determination of peoples outside colonial relations and now, neoliberal policies that are shaping schools. Outside classrooms, great discrepancies between government and marginalized sectors take place beyond epistemological disagreements. In fact, they have translated into concrete acts of violence. Clashes between Indigenous protesters intending to protect their homeland, their environment and way of life and government forces representing non-indigenous economic interests, have resulted in massacres with little to no-resolution. Instead, violence has added more fuel to the conflicts that continue to taint relations between governments and the Indigenous and marginalized citizens.

While the intercultural schoolhouse in the Indigenous community is located in what it may seem, worlds away from political and social violence, education practice in the school is not foreign to ideologies of exclusion. Accounts beginning in the nineteenth century during the birth of the new Peruvian nation after centuries of Spanish colonial rule, show political leaders defining formal education as the opportunity to build national unity through the teaching of one national language and culture. Many leaders drew popular support through rhetoric appealing to unity and progress, which attributed to the Indigenous people (who did not share the beliefs nor language of the nation) the problems facing the country. Thus, with the most “benevolent” intentions, school for the Indigenous children became the place where they, by strict discipline that used physical punishment, needed to cease to speak their own language, rejected their beliefs and thus their Indigenous identity. Innumerable accounts detail how physical punishment was a resource in public education until not too long ago. In contrast, education for the elite sectors differed drastically from the education offered to underserved populations. Still today, public education is out of the question as a possibility for elites to consider. Private schools remain the uncontested choice for the elite and any family able to afford it, in some cases through major economic sacrifice.

3. TEACHERS AS CHANGE AGENTS AND THE ILL-PREPAREDNESS OF INSTITUTIONS

The introduction of intercultural education in bilingual programs in the 1990s shifted attitudes toward Indigenous languages and cultures and recognized them as source of national wealth. From the early years of IBE implementation, the main emphasis of this program has been on language instruction, with little attention paid to culture as something that neither teacher professional development nor formal classroom instruction truly capture (Valdiviezo, 2013). As a number of studies have revealed, Indigenous languages are utilized as part of instruction, but studies have also made evident that - even in their

own language - Indigenous and minoritized students can be taught dominant westernized views and ways to act in the world that reject their own (Valdiviezo, 2014; Valdiviezo and Valdiviezo Arista, 2008). There is however, a more complex landscape shaping the Peruvian Indigenous school. Indeed, intercultural programs can host coexisting contradictory perspectives within the same pedagogical space where, on one hand Indigenous language and culture are further minoritized and, on the other hand, classroom teaching and learning explicitly value and include Indigenous cultural and linguistic practices. In the intercultural classroom, teachers can engage students in discussions about their community practices, from agricultural activities to rituals that reflect the relation of Indigenous people with nature, and can enact these practices inclusively through lessons. At the same time, teachers may use conventional teaching activities and require students to spend most of the time in one lesson copying extensive Spanish texts or taking spelling tests. This more nuanced understanding of what takes place in the intercultural classroom, where we find both contradiction and possibility makes clear that teachers engage in a variety of practices and that what teachers say and do remains central to the implementation of intercultural education in the schoolhouse. While at times, they implement conventional teaching, teachers are also creative agents capable of transforming classroom practice into inclusive and innovative education. Thus, teachers can implement sophisticated teaching ideas that foster the development of critical thinking in their students and integrate Indigenous culture in the classroom curriculum. And while these important transformations may be happening in some intercultural classrooms, overall without sufficient institutional support, it is difficult to transform education for social justice beyond the realms of the IBE school into the rest of the Peruvian society. The role of the State as active advocate for socially just education opportunities for students cannot be obviated. Therefore it is important not to lose sight of the role of governments in framing and supporting initiatives of intercultural education and perhaps more importantly, supporting educators in the intercultural classroom.

Intercultural discourse has been articulated and policy has been written, but not enacted by the State. The State's role ought not to be limited to written policy and mandates, but to demand the reparation and subsequent reconceptualization of the relationship between the State and Indigenous and marginalized sectors. Arguably, the State and institutions remain ill-prepared to implement intercultural education and, in the current climate of increasing ideological and political radicalization, the State is ill-prepared to face these problematic trends.

Outside the classroom setting and away from the communities where Indigenous leaders and government forces collide, in the offices of the Ministry of Education, policy and programs define interculturality as principle of Peruvian education but they situate intercultural education as program only destined for rural schools. Mainstream and urban sectors, despite their racial stratification within a classist societal structure, are neither viewed nor prioritized through an intercultural lens. In other words, from the State, from

the top down, intercultural education is destined to the marginalized, not to the privileged. Never facing the mirror, the education gaze maintained by the government siloes both the marginalized and the privileged in their respective separate realities where connections are severed and made invisible. Through this gaze non-Indigenous students and elites receive education supposed to be desirable, where ideologies glorify the cultural north (the United States and Europe). Education in these settings tends to be unreflective and devoid of historical, social, economic and political issues impacting Peru as a country. In many cases, privileged sectors are unable to identify with members of other sectors, like Indigenous and Afro-Peruvian peoples. It is of no surprise then how ideologies of exclusion can easily take root and expand within privileged sectors who at the same time possess the authority to further justify ideologies perpetuating inequities in public and elite spaces. Several Peruvian scholars analyze the inequalities impacting marginalized Peruvians but only few point at the disengagement of the elites as part of the problem. Outside scholarly circles, the media continues to reinforce racist, classist, and chauvinistic attitudes with little push back from society, who remain the media's main consumers. Within this problematic landscape, education institutions are not prepared to challenge the status quo and promote change. When schooling is mainly serving purposes outside interculturality, and intercultural education remains siloed in the rural school, we can ask again: what is next for interculturality and education in the Peruvian context?

4. CONCLUSION

When we set interculturality against the mirror, we can identify two urgent issues that need attention. One issue is the inability of State to move from policy to enactment of intercultural education as a matter of social justice across Peruvian schools, and not solely Indigenous sectors. Another issue is the increasing ideological and political radicalization of discourse globally, within which the Peruvian society and its institutions already appear divided and exclusive, and therefore as fertile ground for these ideologies to gain momentum and take root. What we know is that these circumstances are not completely foreign or out of the blue but that have historical precedent. An important understanding that can be further emphasized vis-à-vis these challenges is that problems are not solved with the sole change of formal or written discourse, namely the creation of intercultural policy and intercultural programs, but in this case, with profound transformations in the ways the State relates to communities it has marginalized socially, economically and politically, like Indigenous groups.

The challenges are great but this fact should not make us miss the important transformations that have already been taking place in the intercultural classroom in the Indigenous school. These local spaces, which political leaders, scholars and the rest of society tend to overlook, are fertile ground for transformation towards social justice. IBE

teachers are teaching in intercultural ways against the status quo and inequality. Teachers, students, and communities are affirming diversity and, we should not underestimate that they have an important role - which deserves recognition - in the creation of a democratic and more just society. With all its complexities and contradictions, the classroom remains the space where change can and is taking place.

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