ENHANCING CONCEPTS AND MEANINGS: CHANGING MINDSETS

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ABSTRACT:

Diversity is one of the characteristics of life, but active protection of diversity has been identified as a boosting factor for enlarging sustainable life ecosystems. Embracing pluricultural understanding and creating active mindsets for interacting and collaborating in a global society is not just an investment in social understanding, but a survival strategy that the human species should develop and prioritize for enabling better future horizons. To generalize inclusion, equity and common well-being, education systems need to develop active purposes and build comprehensive communities, as much as create scientific knowledge (UNESCO, 2017). Educators' professional development plans should be designed to consider not only what and how to teach and learn, but whom with, and what for. The University of Andorra has designed a master's degree in education in which Democracy Culture is as valuable as teaching methodologies and learning strategies, and citizenship is part of the teacher's professional development.

Key Words: Global society, inclusion, equity, Democracy Culture, Master's degree, University of Andorra.

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Introduction

Education is a cultural pursuit that combines individual and collective processes in human societies, including personal cognitive development, instructional learning, and the acquisition of enlightening or meaningful experiences, to develop a long-term sense of knowledge, habits, skills, competencies, beliefs, values, and different layers of personal identity.

In the deepest shadows of Paleolithic caves, ancient humans have left remains of their need for survival strategies: by painting hunting scenes, they pursue and transmit enduring strategies, attitudes and beliefs that help the tribe live through difficulty, loss, and death of the wise men. When they stamped the palms of their hands on a wall, gathering adults' and children's painted hands together (Hoffmann et al. (2018), they were searching for community values and continuity for the whole group What to do and how to do it was valuable knowledge to survive; whom with and what for gave them a glimpse into a long-term future and the first glimmers of collective horizons.

Today, education systems enable knowledge acquisition to ensure the technological and scientific development that powers the economy. But they should also invest in protecting inclusion and collective interculturality to benefit from the creative richness that language, traditions, and cultural diversity can bring to human development in a global society.

From diversity to cultural diversity: understanding interculturality

Diversity in nature is already understood as a shared patrimony (UNESCO, 2017). Human diversity, based on culture, cannot be seen as a simple collection of different ways of behaving in society. Rather, it is a shared pool of enriching visions for understanding and inhabiting the world. Cultural diversity becomes the complex ecosystem where individual and collective intentional activity will develop mutual understanding, teamwork and collective solidarity.

A descriptive definition of human diversity is not useful enough in education, because it usually focuses on *what* and *how*, without shedding light on the power of intercultural collaboration (*whom with)* and the energy of sharing a common purpose (*what for*):

> Diversity encompasses the range of similarities and differences each individual brings, including but not limited to national origin, language, race, colour, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures (HUD, 2021).

A definition that enhances collaborative models in education, where inclusion and equity are relevant assets, can produce a more dynamic understanding of human diversity, and help create a mindset for promoting creativity, engagement, and social transformation:

Cultural Diversity refers to the manifold ways in which the cultures of groups and societies find expression. These expressions are passed on within and among groups and societies. Cultural diversity is made manifest not only through the varied ways in which the cultural heritage of humanity is expressed, augmented and transmitted through the variety of cultural expressions, but also through diverse modes of artistic creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment, whatever the means and technologies used (UNESCO, 2005).

Teacher training plans and professional development instructional itineraries for teachers should include not only a mechanical description of diversity and personalization strategies for students with special needs; it should also include consistent global active programmes, to engage teachers in networks of collaborative action with other countries and in several languages.

The University of Andorra is a pioneer in organizing a master's degree in education (*Master en Educació, UdA*) where plurilingualism and interculturalism are empowered as key skills for future teachers. It was approved by the Government of Andorra on March 31, 2021 (BOPA, 2021) and it incorporates a plurilingual approach with Catalan, Spanish, and English language learning.

The programme includes a transversal module on democratic culture, where cultural diversity in democracy is presented as one of the educational policies to be followed at school (and at any other educational space at local, national, regional or international levels). This training itinerary is designed to promote participatory values, "aimed at offering educational answers based on the interpretation of the needs and conflicts of social, cultural and economic reality, in line with the values promoted by the Council of Europe" (BOPA, 2021). It seeks to strengthen understanding of the richness of our global human society and the need to protect minorities and vulnerable communities for the common good with an inclusive vision:

- The Democratic Culture itinerary in Andorra's master's degree in education is transversal to everyone in the degree.
- It offers educational responses based on the needs and conflicts of current social, cultural and economic reality in the country.
- It is in line with the values promoted by the Council of Europe (Universitat d'Andorra, 2021).

The master's degree aims to correlate both with human rights and with the values of the Council of Europe, which explicitly advocates for equality, inclusion, and the protection of minorities (Council of Europe, 2021). It promotes participation and engagement for everyone, mutual acceptance of different cultural expressions, and a common commitment to protection of the most vulnerable communities. According to these goals, multiculturalism is the ecosystem in which teachers must actively pursue equity. community cohesion and social justice. Sustainability demands that education transform the way that the next generation will share the world. Today, educational systems should advocate for achieving interculturality (Council of Europe, 2014) and global competencies (OECD, 2018). International institutional aims have two main objectives in common, in order to develop responsible citizenship:

Objective 1: Interculturality. Teachers' professional development needs to integrate the inclusive mindset of participatory acceptance that students adopt towards a person, a group, an institution, an issue, a behaviour, or a symbol from anywhere in the world, as part of global competency.

Objective 2: Global Citizenship Skills. Educators need *openness* towards people from other cultural backgrounds, *respect* for cultural differences and *global mindedness* embracing cultural diversity, and *action* towards the common good.

While embracing pluriculturalism requires accepting, welcoming, and including cultural diversity in order to share a better present, interculturality requires interacting and coworking in cultural diversity, and creating networks with social plural identities for a common future. This participatory goal is fully in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda, and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 17, *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development* (United Nations, 2015a). Education systems need to undertake meaningful paradigm shifts, to transform their traditional instructional designs - that have been useful for knowledge building - into a more organic and participatory long-term educational development - that needs to focus on social justice for a global community - as part of human evolution.

Finding meaning and long-term sense in education as part of global evolution

In line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda, education systems all over the world are starting to consider the 17 Sustainable Development Goals essential for finding meaning in their educational curricula, as they are key to developing responsible citizenship and intercultural support (United Nations, 2015a).

Although the 17 SDGs can be understood as a continuous intertangled network of rights and duties, the *Project-Based Learning* models (PBL) offer a pedagogical approach for school projects to be organized and planned according to different conceptual ecosystems, in one or several school subjects:

- Planet: the SDGs related to ecology and Earth's ecosystems, essential to maintain life on our planet.
- People: the group of SDGs connected to human existence and social communities.
- Production: those SDGs that relate to human industry and consumption.
- Purpose. The SDGs draw a better horizon for peace, prosperity, and justice.

These four P-words are conceptual environments that correlate to the four anthropological spaces described by Pierre Levy (1997, p. 13) in his analysis of early cyberspace, and it is still valid today. Levy identified four cognitive spaces where humans are developing their societies: the Earth (physical space), Territory (national and cultural identity space), Exchange (dynamic sphere for trading) and Knowledge (conceptual sphere of consensual information and meta-reality).

What for?

Exploring environmental reality, to learn about the Planet, People, Production and Purpose, school projects at primary and secondary levels can include collaborative tasks to deal with multi-layers of reality in multicultural societies, and create a more sustainable future.

Whom with?

School families can bring diversity to a school project by exchanging their background, past experiences, and future expectations from all over the world. Parents and teachers can share different perceptions of reality, creating educational debate spaces where students need to interact, learn, negotiate, and build their own strategies to develop collective understanding in their own future community. Collaborative project work should empower every student to speak up and share their personal and cultural experiences. The school community should be open to the world (via students' mobility or using digital interaction), searching for different realities in which to exchange multiple visions of life. A new mindset for interculturality facilitates bridging processes, helps networking, and enables the development of global skills.

Working in diversity can promote inclusive partnerships built upon principles, values, and goals that place people and the planet at the centre (United Nations, 2015b). A clear educational school plan can be set, following four main principles that can encourage transformative processes, from individual belief to collective and shared aims:

- Context Awareness: Exploring data, collecting different personal experiences, gathering information from different sources and diverse media, becomes a learning process to perceive context in different ways.
- Understanding Information: comparing, classifying, and processing information, helps students look at facts differently, trying to analyze cause and consequence, timelines and space distributions, to make sense of complexity from different points of view.
- Action Based on Evidence: planning for action based on previous facts can help teachers and students create different spaces for interaction, exchange, and collaborative analysis of results.
- Embracing plurality: engaging in coworking, interculturality and plurilingualism will foster collective creative thinking, scientific construction, and any other cultural richness, for knowledge building and community building.

Changing our mindset as teachers and learners can provide better knowledge-learning strategies, more efficient learning skills, and a more ethical journey while learning to be a lifelong learners in a global world.

Reflections and open questions

Transforming education for an uncertain world future cannot just be framed around technological development or scientific knowledge building. Understanding complexity is one of the most enlightening processes in human evolution, as it creates the framework for science and philosophy. It needs to be shaped by integrating diversity as collective capital that can bring personal wellbeing and social justice in a global world.

Working together is not enough if educational systems cannot create shared spaces for including minorities, vulnerable people, or voiceless societies in our global worldwide networks. Embracing diversity, activism, and interculturality in education becomes the most effective learning path to guarantee fostering of creativity, consciousness of alterity, and ethical development. At university, we must include democracy studies that enhance respect for minorities and value disagreement as a path for a more inclusive global society.

Changing mindsets in educations is neither fast nor easy. Many questions are still to be answered and unsolved difficulties need to be debated. Two of them are closely related to this article: whom with, what for:

- Whom should we be working with? We need to learn to work with everyone, even those we are not used to. Students, parents, teachers, and other educators in the global educational community should be included in the picture. They can help students create their own debates, intercultural strategies, and social learning spaces, to build their own future where voiceless minorities can be recognized and listened to.

- What for? For the next generation's sustainability, for them to be able to open innovative sustainable goals and new ethical purposes, in a world that we cannot yet imagine.

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356254122_Enhancing_concepts_and_meanings_Changing_mindsets