

Luis Martin Valdiviezo Arista
Escuela de Graduados de la Universidad de Massachusetts
lvaldiviezo@educ.umass.edu

The Promise of Interculturalism in Peruvian Education

This paper is committed to cultural rights and the promotion of politics of tolerance. It shows the gap between Peruvian official discourses and everyday life about the recognition of national cultural diversity, suggests a way to implement interculturality through cross-cultural dialogues in school communities, and reflects on the moral and political advantages of the dialogue to promote a healthy construction of social identities.

The Challenge for Global Democracy.- There is a global consensus about the superiority of democracy over other kinds of political systems to avoid social oppression and to achieve social justice, generally interpreted as respect for human rights. However, even with political goodwill, there is not enough agreement about how to implement democracy at the world and local levels.

With the pervasive conflict of interest between rich and poor individuals, communities, and countries; a main cause of debate and disagreement around the

implementation of democracy is the fact that there are different perceptions and expectations of democracy according to cultural groups. There is an increasing recognition that social realities are more multicultural in the era of globalization where all nations are interdependent and are affected by migrating commodities and populations. National governments are faced with increasing demands to recognize ethnic and cultural differences among their citizens. Thus, in contemporary times, cultural tolerance is regarded as a democratic virtue (United Nations, 2004).

With the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of United Nations in 1948, after the post World War II period, the ideal of democracy based on human rights became the core agenda of the international community. This conception of human rights has been expanded in the last decades. In 1966 and 1979 women's rights and notions of cultural rights were included in the definition of international human rights. Additionally, in 2001, the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity as part of the scope of cultural rights was adopted by UNESCO. In its declaration, UNESCO considers culture as:

...the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and belief ...

The declaration stated that "... cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature ..." (UNESCO, 2001). However, this generalized definition

of “culture” in efforts to protect and promote cultural diversity poses problems to the very concept of human rights. Groups and communities hold different world-views and differential access to power. Some groups with the power to discriminate against or to oppress other groups could hypothetically construe the ideal of cultural diversity to affirm types of cultural relativism, which results in continued exclusion of marginalized cultural groups. Thus, the recognition of cultural diversity cannot be done without clear guidelines and some restrictions. All cultural groups need to co-exist with peace and dignity. The current international notion of human rights provides an initial common ground where all cultures can obtain the recognition of their right to exist. At the same time, human rights should be expanded to include respect for diverse cultural values.

Cultural diversity can be only celebrated when it is compatible with democratic principles.

There are enough historical examples of the violation of human rights to defend the cause of international human rights for pragmatic, not for metaphysical reasons. Yet, in spite of this, it is important acknowledge that Western liberal thought has shaped the contemporary worldviews which inform the concept of human rights. Thus, there is a cultural bias already imbedded in the formulation of international human rights. However, despite its limitations and problems, human rights, as a framework for implementing cultural tolerance, are a starting-point for most United Nations member countries.

The implementation of democracy on a global scale is a long process that requires successive generations to rule public, domestic, and, private spheres, and even in the most democratic countries, the task is not finished. A democratization process among diverse cultural groups is a crucial way to improve democracies. Along with constitutional, economic, and social systems; media; and civil institutions committed to human rights, democratization also requires the participation of educational systems in the deconstruction of intolerant beliefs and the creation of peaceful intercultural relations. The current struggles over cultural identity, inside the wealthy nations as well as in developing countries, demonstrate the need to successfully mediate and manage these contested issues to avoid a global crisis.

Intercultural conflicts should be treated in their respective historical context and understood in their specificity. Universal solutions have worked well for mathematical problems, but not for social problems. To understand and to solve ethical and cultural issues we would need to know in depth the particular historical and contemporary experience of communities in conflict. Foreign solutions can help to open discussion on national problems, yet self-determination and original solutions to cultural problems should not be ruled out. Appropriate and culturally sensitive models and policies depend on each situation; however, what looks universal is an ethic of cultural dignity and peace (Young, 1990).

The following points are focused on Peruvian cultural conflicts, the model of tolerance chosen by Peruvian civil society and state, the ways that official cultural policies are reflected in the current school curricula, and how cultural tolerance can be promoted at school and community levels.

Peruvian Cultural Conflicts.- The dominant culture in Peru is the Hispanic culture since the colonization of Peru by Spain in the XVIth century. This culture is shared by groups with Native, African, Asian and European roots. All these groups have developed a syncretistic process by appropriating of other traditions (including food, religious beliefs, etc.) and by “racial mixing”. According to official as well as popular discourse, this historic cultural-“racial” mixing is considered a positive legacy (Ministerio de Educación, 2002).

With the blurring of racial categories through the creation of a mixed and syncretic Hispanic dominant culture, the national census has not registered any information about race since 1940. However, different NGOs consider that 30% of population of Peru are indigenous, 40% mixed, 10% black, 10% white, 10% Asian, and 50.41% of the total (27’150,000) are women.

As in many other countries, centuries of male supremacy and sexual segregation have generated different male and female worldviews, identities, virtues, and expectations, all these adapted to their particular social roles. In this way, what have emerged are distinct male and female cultures, within a context of male dominance.

In spite of its syncretism, Peruvian society has practiced intolerance against non-European groups and women for centuries, inspired in part by colonial European ideas on white and male's natural superiority. Due to this, Peruvian society is plagued with intercultural conflicts. Most current human rights violations are linked to cultural, racial, and gender prejudices. The Peruvian Truth Commission has established (2003) that the political violence experienced by Peru between 1980 and 2000 was the most intense, extensive and prolonged episode of conflict in the entire history of the Republic. The internal war on terrorism revealed deep and painful divides and misunderstandings in Peruvian society. 69,280 civilian victims died in the violence. 75% of these victims spoke Quechua or other native languages as their mother tongue. The war exacerbated historical prejudices, particularly against indigenous.

Armed groups proposing social revolution in Perú in the last decades were opposed to the recognition of cultural diversity and gender equality. They have been especially cruel against indigenous and, also, female political leaders. Moreover, they have quartered or sexually enslaved thousands of indigenous women. Peruvian military forces, which fight blindly against these armed groups, were systematically violent against indigenous people and women too.

Although 50.41% of Peruvian populations are women, only 18% of current Peruvian Congress representatives are women. The current Peruvian government has 14 ministries and only 2 are run by women; one of these is the minister of Women and

Social Development. The first time that a woman was appointed as Minister was in 1987.

Illiteracy affects 10.7% of Peruvian population. Yet, while the rate of illiteracy among males is 5.3% of illiteracy, among women it is 15.8% (INEI, 2004). One woman per hour is victim of sexual assault. 60% of women are victims of violence in their domestic relationships (Manuela Ramos NGO, 2004).

The Peruvian State against Intolerance- A few years before the internal war, the state began to make reforms in the legal system to avoid discrimination. These reforms failed in their implementation due to the resistance of privileged groups. In 1971, under a military administration, the Peruvian state signed the International Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Between 1972 and 1975, the same administration declared Quechua (the most popular indigenous language) as an official language as well as Spanish, and undertook the creation of different bilingual programs and initiatives. In 1977, a new military administration signed the international Pact on Economic, Social, and Cultural rights. In 1979, the same second military government signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The former (1980) and the current (1993) Peruvian Constitution incorporated the principles of all these documents. Moreover, they recognize and protect the ethnic and cultural diversity of nation.

After the debate of the last decades, the Peruvian state, under a democratic administration, created in 1989 the bilingual-intercultural policy to promote cultural tolerance. Hence, interculturality became the official model of tolerance. Interculturalism is defined as a dialogical process among cultural groups committed to the recognition of diversity. Interculturality is considered, by state and civil society, an essential principle in making Peruvian democracy viable.

Nevertheless, the attempts to affirm multiculturalism in Peru are conflicting processes, largely because the derogatory images of non-European groups and women have not been erased from the national beliefs. There is a divorce between constitutional rights and social practices. Indigenous and Afro-descendants Peruvian people stated in 2001:

... we still suffer racism, racial discrimination ... we demand bilingual and intercultural education across the whole country and in all levels with direct participation of discriminated people ..." (Peruvian Inter-Ethnic National Commission, 2001).

Interculturalism has been proclaimed, but the national dialogue has not started yet. Interculturalism, as cross-cultural dialogue, can open a common space where participants' worldviews, historical narratives and experiences, identities, and community needs and expectations can be voiced. Intercultural dialogue as an inter-subjective process permits the redefinition of images, the elimination of stereotypes, and an understanding of cultural differences among individuals and communities. Individual

and collective self-knowledge allows possibilities to reformulate, or to defuse, beliefs and social practices that prevent equitable and informed peaceful coexistence. Thanks to dialogue, the discussion of cultural differences can become a great opportunity for mutual enrichment and recognition.

Current Curricula Abstains from Interculturality.- The Peruvian Education Ministry published the Basic Curricular Design (BCD) for 2004 Middle and High School Levels inside the Curricular Development National Strategy Program. This document reflects the state policies in “The State of Right and of Democratic Governmental Year” and “The Inclusive Education Decade”.

The BCD 2004 is divided by 10 areas: language and communication; foreign language; mathematics; science-technology-environment; social science; work education; individual- family- human relationship; physical education; art; and religion. The BCD suggests as transverse themes: peace and citizenship education; human rights education; intercultural education; love, sexuality, and family education; environmental education; and gender equity education. Considering Peruvian conflicts in the last decades, there are many positive reasons for these overarching themes. Even more, these themes reflect the Peruvian state and academic concerns about national issues. Moreover, the BCD suggests the promotion of the following moral values: peace; respect; solidarity; responsibility; honesty; freedom; laboriousness; and tolerance. Also, it proposes to stimulate the following attitudes: respectful rules for living together;

perseverance at work; proactive learning; cooperative and democratic disposition and; organizational orientation.

Despite this large ethical agenda to foster positive relationships, the curricula show a notorious absence of rigorous themes regarding of interculturality. For example, the language-communication area does not mention Peruvian linguistic diversity, which includes around fifty indigenous languages, and also Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Italian, and other languages preserved by smaller groups. This omission offers a false image of Perú as a mono-linguistic country among students and perpetuates the politics of ignorance about non-Hispanophone communities.

The only area where the second language acquisition is promoted is “foreign language”, which properly means English. The same limited perspective is present in science-technology-environment area. This area promotes notions of European reason scientific achievement; in effect, it is Eurocentric. There is not one sentence regarding to indigenous, African, and Asian contributions to science-technology-ecology.

Obviously, the appropriate area in which to work on Peruvian cultural conflicts is social science. However, there is no mention of real social issues such as racism and violence against women in the curriculum, despite the fact that these were causes of genocide during the last war (1980-2000). In some way, the violence was fueled by an overarching pre-existing intolerance found in the overall culture. Even worse, the BCD

does not recognize any contribution of non-Western groups and women to the national legacy.

The individual-family-human relationship area has as a goal for “... the development of capabilities for self-knowledge, strengthen of self-esteem and autonomy, and the development of social skills for positive interaction”. Sexuality and gender are mentioned as important elements to build identities; however, ethnicity and color are omitted.

The religious education area absolutely ignores the existence of indigenous, Asian, non-Catholic, and non-Christian religions in Perú. Even worse, non-Catholic people are called “non-believers” giving in this way direct assault against non-Catholic religious people.

The BCD is generally inadequate to stimulate nuanced and historically informed cross-cultural dialogues, not to contribute significantly to the banishment of beliefs and social practices that offend the dignity of all human beings and produce a painful everyday social and individual experience for many Peruvians. The main cause of this lack of political will and vision is that the Peruvian state is shaped and monopolized by those holding fast to the dominant Hispanic-Catholic culture. The work to build a true Interculturalism is as yet only a promise.

Building Intercultural Citizenship through Education.- The short-sightedness, inconsistencies, and self-censorship in state discourses on Interculturalism reflect an

insufficient will towards democratization. Due to this, the work of building cultural tolerance and intercultural understanding in the next decades most will depend on Peruvian civil society. It can act at grass roots level to assert interculturality in the every day life. One way to do this into the school system is promoting intercultural dialogues at a school community level. It is important to consider that merely a series of dialogues over a few years will deconstruct old stereotypes and power relationships based on historically entrenched racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes.

A school-based participatory democracy project committed to interculturalism would need to foster cross-cultural dialogues at every level. Participants may elect knowledgeable facilitators to mediate inequalities and distortions in the conversation. I suggest that the dialogue at school community level be organized using the following steps:

- 1) Participants introduce themselves expressing their views on peace, democracy, cultural tolerance, and education. The participants should be encouraged to be aware of the need to achieve ways of living together with equal dignity;

- 2) Participants identify and share aspects of cultural diversity regarding the communities from which they are representative. A democratic citizenship would offer space for different voices, so each group should be consulted about its local, regional, and global educational experiences, needs and desires;

3) Participants recognize different contributions of each cultural group to the community. There are Peruvian traditions that can support cultural tolerance, such as the indigenous principle of reciprocity and their practice of solidarity; the Christian principle of universal love and the dignity of all human beings; the Asian sense of loyalty and harmony; the African sense of freedom and happiness; and a feminine sense of social justice, for example. Explorations of all community cultural resources can enrich the community legacy;

4) Participants honestly describe discrimination and violence issues in the community. This reflection can help to identify the main threads against social justice and peace in the community;

5) Participants commit to banish discrimination at domestic and public levels, and to design strategies to prevent racial, cultural, and sexual aggressions at both levels;

6) Participants choose cultural content to be included in the curricula to reach and improve peace, democracy, cultural tolerance, and education;

7) Participants design a model to shape the physical environment according to the ideals of peace, democracy, and interculturalism. Material and visual symbols and aids can help to keep and strengthen intercultural democratic awareness. The design can include posters, slogans, plastic arts, music, etc;

8) Participants propose extra-curricular activities to celebrate cultural diversity. The recognition of the richness of cultural diversity can instill a sense of pride of this legacy among diverse Peruvian citizens;

9) Participants define protective measures against implicit and explicit, verbal or physical abuse or intolerance, including for example legal tools and recommendations for police forces. Intercultural dialogue should put limitations and parameters on what we can accept of our own culture and another culture. This means, in other words, to democratize national Peruvian culture. Without a democratic culture it is not possible to successfully run a democratic political system.

The project of intercultural dialogue have challenges. The lack of dialogic tradition in Peruvian society and the existence of intolerant voices can be obstacles in the task of creating mutual and respectful recognition among all groups.

There are many other opportunities to develop successful dialogues across Perú. The Peruvian people almost unanimously wish to live with peace and dignity, most Peruvians have, in fact, a syncretistic culture that articulate values of different cultural traditions, and most of Peruvian families are multiethnic and can see the diversity in their own family history. Traditions have a beginning, and with intercultural dialogue, interculturalism can become a part of Peru's traditions.

Dialogue, Identity and Recognition.- Intercultural dialogue can be a powerful tool to build school communities committed to inter-cultural democracy and to redesign school

curricula. Intercultural recognition does not mean that all groups have to subscribe the same values to reach understanding or consensus. In many cases, it is enough to recognize different and particular values in each group that are compatible with human rights. This is the case, for example, for individuals and communities who hold different religious and non-religious beliefs. People can live together in peace and dignity without sharing religious beliefs. One of the great possibilities in the intercultural dialogue is the discovery of differences and commonalities, the acknowledgment that our worldview is one among many perspectives. The acknowledgement of our particularity is already a great contribution to individual and collective imagination and intelligence.

Dialogue is an inter-subjective intellectual and emotional activity. It is a basic process through which human awareness and identity are built (Taylor, 1994; Habermas, 1999). The opportunity to pose questions and to explore answers permits us to improve and expand upon our knowledge of ourselves and others. This understanding can be richer if the answers extend our imagination and curiosity, and let us inter-act efficiently with our whole reality.

No one can grow up as a rational human being in the social isolation. We are human beings thanks to the communication with, at least, other human being. Communication permits us to assimilate cultural traditions. Humanization entails the acquisition of culture. Every dialogue is placed in a particular cultural context, in order

to explore that context and its relation to other contexts. And expanded notion of identity is shaped by exchanging images about ourselves and others through interactions. These images can be rewarding or painful. In the latter case, negative images can distort our self-perception, prevent our self acceptance and, of course, damage our self-esteem – a cause of moral suffering (Taylor, 1994).

Due to low self-esteem, it is very unhealthy to produce and to reproduce pejorative images of individuals and groups who happen to be different from ourselves. Open dialogue can defuse and erase these prejudices and permit more accurate images of ourselves and others. Dialogue implies the capability of articulating at least two perspectives about the same topic. Dialogue permits consensus, mutual understanding, or mutual recognition, which are the basis of all democratic social organization. In this sense, dialogue has a capability to link individuals ethically and politically.

However, dialogue can fail for many reasons. Some dangers that can disrupt dialogue are dogmatism and greed. Dogmatism is by definition opposed to diversity, and dogmatic discourse is incapable of self-assessment, bringing distorted judgments on reality and other people. Such judgment can generate xenophobia, collective paranoia, blind hate, and, finally, genocide.

Dialogue is also threatened when some speakers try to use it as a tool to deceive other participants with the intention to favor their particular interests. Nevertheless, a

strong culture of dialogue in the community is the best defense against the false interlocutor.

Among individuals who belong to the same cultural tradition, dialogue takes place on common underlying beliefs, and is useful to explore, clarify, critique, or to strengthen the world-view that they already have. Disagreement among members of the same culture can be solved by analyzing each opinion according to their common underlying beliefs, to assess which opinion is more compatible with them. Conditions for making intercultural dialogues are complex, because there may not be common underlying beliefs to begin with, and the building of commonality is not always guaranteed. The end of the intercultural dialogue may not be a unified consensus but the recognition of the “others,” an acknowledgement and a willingness to work further with issues of diversity and interculturalism. Thanks to this kind of dialogue, the humanity of the “others” is known and a process of further recognition and understanding is begun.

Nevertheless, to state that “all cultures are valuable” and to try to recognize them just from this simple notion of relativism is to offer an empty recognition. Without making intercultural dialogues, which speak to issues of difference and power simultaneously, we will not know what is valuable of the “others” (Tubino, 2002), nor will we build an expanded notion of self. This does not promote a worthy and peaceful living together. A shallow recognition of difference, moreover, can be easily destroyed by paranoid voices, which manipulate the fear of unknown, describe the “others” as

enemies. The past and the present are full of plenty of examples of wars and explosions of violence against the “others” caused by ignorance, fear, and hostility.

Recognition of the difference can not be overly general. Intercultural respect and recognition has to be rooted in ethics of social justice and democracy in order for it to result in true understanding in order to insure that individuals and communities may live together with peace and dignity.

Bibliography

Arnove, Robert F. (1997). *Neoliberal education policies in Latin America: arguments in favor and against*. From Carlos Alberto Torres and Adriana Puiggrós, eds, *Latin American education: comparative perspectives*, Westview Press.

Arnove, Robert and Torres, Carlos Alberto (2003). *Comparative Education: the Dialectic of the Global and the Local*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (2003). *Informe Final*. Retrieved December 5, 2003 from www.cverdad.org.pe

Dibos, Alessandra (2003). *Openness to/For What? Democratic Citizenship Education and the Broadening of Spaces Where Conflict can be Understood and dealt with more Responsibility*. Ministerio de Educación del Perú.

Gonzales, M. (1994). *How many Indigenous People?* In Psacharopoulos G. and Patrinos H. A. (Eds.), *Indigenous People and Poverty in Latin America. An Empirical Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

Habermas, Jurgen (1999). *The Inclusion of the Other*. Studies in Political Theory. Cambridge: MIT.

Hernández, Juanita de (1999). *La Multiculturalidad y la Resolución de Conflictos*. Santa Cruz: Universidad Núr.

Hornberger, N. (1997). *Language planning from the bottom up*. In N. Hornberger (Ed), *Indigenous literacies in the Americas*. (pp. 358-366). Berli: Mouton de Gruyter.

Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (2004). *ENAH0 2000. Proyecciones de Población 1995-2025*. Retrieved March 26, 2004 from www.inei.gob.pe

Kymlicka, Hill (2002). *Estados multiculturales y ciudadanos interculturales*. Lectura, V Latin American Congreso of Bilingual-Intercultural Education, Lima-Perú, August.

Young, Iris Marion (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ministerio de Educación (2004). *Programa Estratégico Nacional de Desarrollo Curricular*. Educación Secundaria de Menores. Retrieved March 7, 2004 from www.minedu.gob.pe

Ministerio de Educación (2002). *Politica Nacional de Lenguas y Culturas en la Educación*. Dirección Nacional de Educación Bilingue Intercultural-DINEBI.

Peruvian Constitution (1993). Retrieved December 5, 2002 from www.congreso.gob.pe

Peruvian Inter-Ethnic National Commission (2001). *Declaración de Pachacamac*. Retrieved March 1 from <http://ekeko2.rcp.net.pe/chirapaq/pacahacamac.htm>

Taylor, Charles and others (1994). *Multiculturalism: examining the politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Teivainen, Teivo (2000). *Towards a Democratic Theory of the World-System: Democracy, territoriality, and Transnationalization*. Journal of World-Systems Research, VI, 3, Fall/Winter.

Torres, Carlos Alberto and Nicholas C., Burbules (2000). *Globalization and education: critical perspectives*. New York: Routledge.

Torres, Carlos Alberto and Adriana Puiggrós (1997). *Latin American education: comparative perspectives*. Boulders: Westview Press.

Tubino, Fidel (2002). *Interculturizando el Multiculturalismo*: Retrieved June 23, 2004 from www.pucp.edu.pe/eventos/intercultural/pdfs/inter6.PDF.

UNESCO (2004). *Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity*. Retrieved March 16, 2004 from www.un.org

United Nations (2004). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Retrieved March 11, 2004 from www.un.org

United Nations. *Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*. Retrieved July 21, 2004 from hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/

Valdiviezo, Laura (2002). *Government Policies, Education Reform and Bilingual Programs in Perú 1790-1990*. Unpublished manuscript. New York: Columbia University.

World Bank (1999). *Education sector strategy*. Retrieved November 6, 2003 From www1.worldbank.org/education/strategy.asp

World Bank (2002). *The World Bank and the education in the Latin American and Caribbean region*. Retrieved May 12, 2003 from Wbln0018.worldbank.org/LAC/LAC.nsf/ECAD