



Pedagogy and Intercultural Communication to Manage the Complexity of the Postmodern World

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Abstract: The postmodern age is characterised by plurality and complexity, elements that, while offering a multiplication of opportunities, make it more difficult to find vistas of meaning and areas of shared values. In fact, the changes in rules, values and modes of interaction often generate feelings of insecurity or instability that can result in individual and social crises. This paper explains how pedagogy and intercultural communication can offer appropriate responses to the current crisis, given that they are based on fruitful engagement with thought, concepts and preconceptions and that they are geared towards notions “of being”, where the human person in its entirety is pivotal, regardless of its linguistic, cultural, social and religious affiliations.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Education.

1. Introduction

What does it mean to be a citizen in an environment that necessitates a plurality of social, cultural and political affiliations? What new form of citizenship can exist in a society where difference is a resource? These are some of the questions that lie at the root of today’s society, a complex, multicultural society that requires a radical change of perspective, a new approach to human relations. Such a change first of all requires that concepts such as identity and culture be seen no longer as static and rigid in nature but dynamic and, therefore, in constant evolution; migration, like alterity, should be considered as an opportunity for enrichment and individual and collective growth and no longer as a threat of hardship (Portera, 2006).

Fundamental in this respect is the intercultural approach where the prefix “inter” denotes the wellspring of reciprocity, which is in turn a fertile ground for negotiation and exchange, emphasising the richness and productivity of confrontation. If multiculturalism is in fact an

objective condition of the coexistence of different cultures, interculturalism is the response to the multiethnic, multicultural society and involves a willingness to leave the confines of one’s own culture to enter the territory of others in order to see, know and interpret reality in terms of multiple, diversified and symbolic patterns and systems. A crucial role is thereto played by communication, which sets out the conditions of openness to the Other and allows the creation of thresholds for a transition between cultural forms. And this is due to the fact that, with the advent of globalisation, every communication has somehow become intercultural, since each of us works interculturally each time we communicate with someone else (Singer, 1987). And in fact in the “global village” (McLuhan, 1962) it is impossible to avoid contact, if not exchange, with people belonging to cultures that may be profoundly different from the one that seems most familiar to us. It is therefore essential to learn to manage exposure to diversity by communicating interculturally.



The purpose of this article is to illustrate the effective contribution that pedagogy and intercultural communication can give in helping to overcome the crisis of values, governance and orientation in which we find ourselves: “The challenge is to accept real change, responding in a prepared manner; without closing ourselves uncritically in the past (thereby reproducing modes, strategies and objectives outdated by events) and without uncritically committing to all the modes of the present” (Portera, 2006, p. 55).

2. Intercultural pedagogy

The being of man is a being-in-the-world that has always been a being-together-with-others interwoven with movement, rapid flow and *métissage*. The contemporary age and the speed that characterises it have in fact brought into focus man’s hybrid nature and made more evident the problematic nature of his being. In this context, one of the most critical issues faced by pedagogy is represented by interaction between individuals and between groups. While it is true that human beings are all relatives, so too is the fact that they are all different and it is from these very differences that the problems seem to spring (Portera, 2011). This is demonstrated by the fact that, despite the age-old existence of migration, man has still not managed to adequately solve the issue of coexistence.

The intercultural pedagogical approach is a Copernican revolution in the way we conceive of alterity and education in the complex society. It is the most appropriate and qualified educational response to the globalisation of human beings and their forms of life, to the growing co-presence of diverse traditions, customs, languages, modes of behavioural and religions. It opposes not the idea of humanity and universality of human rights, but rather the abstract universalism that would see humanity only as identical individuals, abstracting their particularities. Intercultural vision does not therefore neglect differences, but places them in a common reference framework:

Relativism guarantees the authoritativeness of the current values in humanity, and therefore

the recognition of those who are their bearers, but does nothing to put these values in a satisfactory relational context, which is precisely the *raison d’être* of interculturality (Camilleri, 1989, p. 31) [...] The multicultural emerges when bearers of different systems produce spontaneous effects that require no intervention. However, we can talk of intercultural when we must govern relations between the two subjects, at least to reduce the unpleasant effects of the encounter, or, at best, to let the subjects involved profit from its supposed advantages (Camilleri, 1993, p. 34).

C. Camilleri thus underlines the relationship, the juxtaposition of different values, with the aim of reducing the difficulties and increasing the benefits of the encounter. The intercultural vision recognises in difference the value of multifacetedness in human relations, the possibility of changes of perspective and pluralism of values and models. The prefix “inter”, which requires the exchange of two or more elements, is the cornerstone of intercultural pedagogical discourse (Abdallah-Preteuille, 1986). As Portera (2013) points out, the concept of inter-action should be understood in the psychological sense of “activities in activity” and takes on the characteristics of dynamism and reciprocity. Intercultural pedagogy thus overcomes the atomistic/disjunctive paradigm and opts for an ontology of relations, which is based on the assumption that the original ontological condition of the human being is that of being-with, of being-together, in the sense that the singular is now plural. In this sense, the intercultural approach promotes dialogue – intended both as a real practice and an ethical perspective – that comes from listening to each other and that involves a critical and constructive dimension. Therefore, it is distinct both from the cross-cultural approach, based on universalist theories and aimed at identifying elements common to all human beings¹, and the multicultural approach,

1-Or, «Everything we can ‘put in middle of the table’ with regard to aspects of identity that know no differences and borders. Everything that belongs to us as humans – from ideas to feelings to emotions to forms of creativity – is transcultural” (Demetrio, 1997,



based on the assumption of unrepeatability and non-modularity of each culture as well as the right to autonomy; it merely considers the factual situation – the presence of two or more cultures – and aspires towards the study of commonalities and differences².

The relationship with the other, in the complexity of the postmodern world, increasingly regards persons of different culture, origin, attitudes, religion and ways of life. Engagement with diversity brings into play personal identity, which is increasingly plural and ever-changing in character. In order to promote intercultural training and educational programmes, the dynamics of identity and culture must first be understood, starting with an in-depth analysis of the concepts of alterity, identity and culture.

3. Alterity, identity and culture

One of the concepts to be clarified when pp. 39-40). The pedagogical model that results is one of global education; which, despite having merits, is vulnerable to criticism both because of its basically unrealistically unitary vision of a largely uneven and fragmented world, and the fact that such movement, of purely European origin, could prove to be another form of cultural dominance (Portera, 2013).

2-“Multicultural education would facilitate the achievement of such cosmopolitan pleasures as well as provide us with a more enlightened and enriched way of life. That is, multicultural education would seek to foster both the attitude of ‘multiculturalism’ [...] and knowledge about the aesthetic and intellectual traditions of various cultures. “Multiculturalism” in its political sense has come to mean the insistence on the recognition of the value of other cultures and the significance of such recognition for the sense of well being of all the members of a liberal-democratic state” (Dhillon, 2005, p. 88). However, one of the main risks to this outlook is to view cultures as rigid and static; this danger applies also to the stratification and hierarchy of groups. Not only that: in terms of educational interventions, there is a risk of considering only exotic and folkloric presentations that end up binding people more closely to the presumed «culture of origin», i.e. towards rigid and stereotyped behavioural modes that may sometimes be exceeded even in the country of origin (Portera, 2013).

discussing intercultural pedagogy is that of “culture”. In the 19th century, pursuant to the classificatory logic of “ethnological reason”³, anthropology developed a concept of culture connected to a determined territory, attributing a specific culture to each local group or nation. Nowadays such a divisive vision would be misleading. Every culture must be considered mixed. There are no compact, homogeneous cultures linked to a particular territory; instead they are all marked by exchanges and crossings. Since the second half of the 20th century, anthropological thought has undermined the concept of culture(s) as different “packages” with their own integral character, linked to a specific geographical area; instead it has proposed various concepts that move on from the division and classification-based idea. J.L. Amselle (1999) proposes an idea of origin indefiniteness, which argues that what always happens increasingly looks like a more or less continuous chain of cultures and society, rather than a clear distinction between cultures. This is a “hybrid” logic, i.e. a continuist approach, which emphasises indistinctness or original syncretism. In line with this concept, intercultural pedagogy sees culture as a notion that identifies realities describable as frayed, without edges, difficult to define, in constant flux and going through a continuous process of mutual influence. A culture cannot be reduced to essential traits because each one is plural and has many voices. Even a single one is not that (being itself multicultural). It is not innate, but is learned through social relationships. However, culture is never absorbed passively: there is a reciprocal relationship between the individual and the group, a mutual influence. Being dynamic and permeable, it tends to change over time, continually reinventing itself: some ways of life disappear, others emerge. It is therefore important to avoid setting them within rigid and

3- J.L. Amselle (1999, p. 41) defines ethnological reason as “the discontinuist outlook that extracts, filters and classifies in order to identify types in the political field (State societies/societies without a State), the economic field (self-subsistence/market), the religious field (Paganism/Islam) and finally the ethnic or cultural field.”



anachronistic canons.

Intercultural education provides the “lenses” through which to view cultures in their dynamism, their temporal and territorial transformations and through the unique history of the people encountered. [...] In the intercultural relationship we do not consider culture as a thing in itself (it being an abstraction), but as a dress worn by individuals in a personal way. Every individual, in their diversity, is a carrier of a particular cultural identity; contacts take place between individuals, not between cultures as such. [...] (Individuals who) live in multiple cultural habitats (Sayad, 2002, pp. 42-43).

Supporting the idea of the concept of “culture”, M. Abdallah-Preteille (2006, pp. 109-116) argues that today’s accepted meaning cannot give a satisfactory account of contemporary cultural diversity and suggests that the discussion be of “culturality” rather than culture.

The concept of culturality highlights the instrumental function of culture to the detriment of its ontological function [...]; it allows us to get an idea of the cultural phenomenon in terms of outcome of dynamics, of transformations, of manipulations and underlines the fact that cultures are always moving, unstable, variegated and honeycomb-like. [...] It is able to facilitate the emergence of complex thoughts, taking into account the small details, interstices and braces of communication and culture.

Cultures, continues the author, citing P. Bourdieu (1992), are not reality, but products of social and discursive activity and are positioned at the intersection of two approaches: one relational and one of belonging. Because of the multiplication of contacts and exchanges, no individual can any longer feel at ease within a single cultural framework: “Belonging wavers and the culture becomes more personalised through loans and gifts. This leads to the practice of “cultural zapping” and looting that complicate decoding and comprehension processes. Change and complexity, rather than stability and homogeneity, are now the points of reference” (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006, pp.

110-111). A further warning about the use of the concept of “culture” comes from M. Santerini (2003). In studying the dynamics related to culture, says this pedagogist, care should be taken not to use the “cultural” as a diversion to conceal deep social inequalities. The cultural context cannot be considered independently of the social one, since along with the cultural difference, the one relating to class or gender cannot be found. The two registers, cultural and social, should never be separated, but instead dovetailed in order to ensure fairness and cultural recognition. It is necessary then to think of flexible policies that take on board difference and do not neglect to act principally against inequalities⁴. Based on these reflections, M. Abdallah-Preteille affirms the need to consider the concept of “alterity”, of “diversity” (and not that of “culture”) as central in intercultural education: in situations of cultural diversity and difference, the crucial issue is not knowledge of cultures, but understanding of the human experience in its singularity and its universality. The culture, affiliation and history of the Other may create filters that hinder encounter and understanding. Intercultural education, however, is based on the encounter of the Other as Other, and is based on the demand for the freedom of the other, respect for their complexity, their non-transparency and their contradictions.

From the reflections on the concept of culture, it can be guessed that in intercultural education the notion of “identity” should be understood as relational and dynamic. Identity is constantly constructed and reconstructed within social exchanges, so the sense of identity changes and evolves in relation to the other and to the relationship that develops. Identity and

4- According to W. Hutmacher (1987), by ignoring the biological paradigm (differences are caused by genetic inheritance), the economic paradigm (the biggest influence comes from material conditions) or the social paradigm (inequalities are illustrated through the relationships between groups), the cultural paradigm thus allows the exclusion of the institutions from the debate and, above all, the diversion of resources and attention intended for social inequalities. Developing this argument, the «cultural» risks becoming a factor of division.



alterity are linked by an amicable relationship through which the former is constructed upon an open and continuous relationship with the other, structured as a permanent experience of distinction-encounter, cohesion-separation, departure-return (Pinto Minerva, 2008). The task of intercultural education is to oppose the “identity trap”, built from within or by others, allowing the person to remain free to choose his or her identity without being imprisoned, enabling people to be considered people in their singularity and totality, not imposing an image different from the one they have of themselves, and valuing the resources of everyone.

The concept of “identity” is closely tied to that of “recognition”, since personal identity is shaped, positively or negatively, by the recognition or lack thereof of what we are on the part of other people. Intercultural education thus operates so that others are recognisable, and so that individuals are able to recognise themselves among their group or at least try to do so. The gestures of recognition do not happen in the abstract, but in the territories, open or closed physical spaces, in the streets, in the squares, in the shop, in the classroom and in the laboratory. The first step in being able to communicate and understand each other is to recognise each other as persons, i.e. to recognise the sense of a ‘common human belonging’ (Morin, 1999). To do this it is necessary that there is a sense of responsibility from both sides, not just one. The act of recognition thus implies a shared responsibility that cannot be ignored.

Intercultural pedagogy promotes the encounter with the other and the construction of shared meanings. This goal can only be achieved in concrete encounters between different people who seek to compare feelings, attitudes and world views in a dialogical attempt to build a piece of common world. However, the process of “cultural understanding”⁵ is fraught with

5-M. Santerini (2003) proposes intercultural understanding in a hermeneutic sense, as a process that allows in-depth understanding of the meanings attributed to culture in a dynamic-eschatological dimension intended to realise (not to suppose as already given) encounter. What it means is the achievement

obstacles; engagement with difference is tiring, and the search for common meaning cannot take place without the emergence of conflict. In this sense, it is only if all stakeholders are able to accept and recognise the other – going through a sort of decentralisation from themselves – and are willing to question their own points of view, that a joint dialogue can develop and construct shared tracks. Central in this regard is the role of communication as a pedagogical tool.

4. Intercultural communication

In the early 1930s, the American anthropologist E.T. Hall (1959) began his studies on communication in order to develop a theory of culture. Convinced that people’s ways of thinking were influenced by language (itself inseparable from culture), he devoted much of his life to the study of the social organisation of space and time. In his view the measurement systems of time and space influence the way we perceive reality; in this respect, he highlights the (hidden) cultural dimension of behaviours in the various communities he studied. It is by drawing on the “hidden dimension” that each person measures and frames their picture of the world, of themselves and of others; therefore, cultural models affect personal relationships, verbal and non-verbal behaviours and communication intents⁶. This reading of reality is the basis of the theory that “people of different cultures not only speak different

of common meaning, which takes place at the end of a not infrequently long, tiring and ambiguous road, through the exchange of interpretations, experiences and symbols.

6- Culture symbolically represents the world and makes it possible to assign meaning to reality. L.A. Samovar and R.E. Porter (2000, p. 258) explain that “it is primarily an implicit and non-verbal phenomenon, since most aspects of one’s own culture are learned through observation and imitation, rather than through explicit verbal expression and instruction. The base level of culture is communicated implicitly, without awareness, primarily through non-verbal means”. Therefore, we can say that communication makes the culture visible by helping, inter alia, to define it. In the process of transmission, however, it is reinterpreted and inevitably transformed.



languages, but inhabit different sensory worlds” (Hall, 1959, p. 13). This explains why in international and multicultural human relations, political or business meetings, difficulties may arise due to the lack of a correct interpretation of meanings overshadowed by communication. There are obstacles that get in the way of “good communication” and that derive mainly from the lack of awareness of the parties involved, by the fact that each lives in a different perceptive world. When people from different cultures meet and enter into communicative “contact”, they are often convinced that the mere mastery of a common language assures mutual understanding; in reality, other factors come into play that may give rise to real conflicts and “cultural shock”. Another significant element is the concept of “proxemics”, which refers to the use of space in social relations. According to E.T. Hall (1959), each culture develops a particular way to consider and use space. For example, there is a clear unwritten rule on the distance to be kept when interacting with each other (the “invisible bubble”), which varies significantly according to the culture, specific situation and the relationship between the interlocutors. If one of them breaks the rules that govern interpersonal distance, the other person may feel threatened and invaded in their spaces and may respond with defensive behaviours. Proxemics not only allows the study of relations of closeness and distance in interpersonal communication, but also extends the analysis to the unintended aspects that affect it:

Moving through space, man organises and consolidates his visual world using the messages that he receives from his whole body. He is influenced by the experience of space practically in his every cultural trait and in his every action. The sense of space is a blend of many sensory inputs: visual, auditory, [...]. Each of these senses is, in turn, a very complicated communications system, divided into a number of modes, specific organs, uses and functions (Hall, 1959, p. 240).

The eyes, for example, apart from being instruments for receiving information, perform an actual “transmitter” function castigating,

encouraging or establishing a relationship of domination; the research of E.T. Hall showed that greater or lesser dilation of the pupils can indicate interest or dislike. In other words, people communicate even when not doing so verbally; although we may strive to keep a neutral posture and minimise gestures and facial expressions, silence and immobility also transmit information, if it is just an unwillingness to communicate. These studies have led to an awareness that the organisation of space (such as the furnishings of a room or the choice of clothing) is a non-verbal communication system conditioned by the culture belonged to and provides a lens through which to watch and assess the behaviour of others. As a result, a lack of awareness of such aspects can arouse, in the context of multicultural encounters, feelings of discomfort and introversion between the interlocutors. Not surprisingly, intercultural communication refers to a dialogical concept of communication: the term “dialogue”, in fact, derives from the Greek *dià-légein*, where *dià* is a preposition indicating separation and discord, but also reciprocity; *légein* means talk, collect, bind. So, through dialogue, that which is separated becomes bound. It assumes first of all a willingness to encounter others and openness to active listening and mutual recognition. With dialogue not only do we share information that enriches knowledge, we also cooperate in building a world shared by the exchanging of symbols.

5. Cultural variability and communicative conflicts

Because of cultural and contextual variables and a lack of awareness of them, interaction between people of different cultures is marked by moments of asynchrony, which are manifested in silences, overlapping, unexpected reactions and interruptions. The interlocutors, usually unaware of both the socio-cultural learnings and communicative conventions that underpin their interaction, perceive only the failure of the encounter and rarely identify the causes. Often the explanation of such failure is couched in psychological rather than sociological or cultural terms:



the interlocutor is viewed as uncooperative, aggressive, slow or incompetent. Over time, repeated failed multicultural encounters can lead to the formation of prejudices and negative stereotypes, which go to create an additional obstacle to the communication process.

Conflict or communicative misunderstanding, produced by the many variables of symbolic and analogical language, is a product mutually constructed by all participants in the interaction. Although two people, whether or not belonging to the same culture, may know the same linguistic code, they will be unlikely to share the same implied meanings if they do not possess the same socio-cultural categories. Therefore, they will not be able to understand the hidden dimension of communication, made up of rules of gestures and interpersonal distance, and of symbols of status and hierarchy. Non-verbal elements of language, often perceived as universal, are what changes in every culture. In this regard, L.M. Barna (2002) observed some foreign students who had recently moved to the United States and highlighted how the smile does not have a universal significance, but varies depending on the culture. Even the tone of voice used during a conversation varies culturally: in Mediterranean countries people usually speak "loud", while Asians and Northern Europeans have a tendency to "whisper". Therefore, taking the example of the Italians, they are often identified as an aggressive people, an idea confirmed also by some of their other habits not shared by Asians, North Europeans and Americans (such as gesturing, intense use of facial expressions and a tendency to invade the space of the interlocutor). Cultural relativity also applies with regard to vocabulary: words that identify colours, for example, may not have corresponding terms in some languages of the world; peoples such as the Yéí Dnye of New Guinea do not have specific words to indicate them. Also with Western idioms, there are many situations where translation difficulties can be strong; for example, the Russian adjective *pošlyj* is difficult to translate into Italian, because it covers a wide range of terms such as: petty, unworthy, mediocre, banal, lacking any interest,

and vile in moral, spiritual and common terms. The problem does not affect only particular words; in fact, it must be remembered that terms such as friendship, freedom, justice, truth and power take on different meanings depending on the cultures in question, since they reflect different cultural ideals. In other words, in entering into communicative contact, the speaker tends to control the formal aspect of the language, but loses sight of the fact that it is not just pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, but is an entity that is far more complex and is linked to cultural factors, whereby a gesture or a garment can contradict what was said by the digital code and cause embarrassment and tension. As the American sociologist R. Birdwhistell (1970) noted, only 35% of human communication is carried by the word; 38% is conveyed by intonation and the rest by the body language. We are therefore much more "seen" than "heard" and often, it is only after considering what we see of a person (appearance, dress, etc.), that we decide, even unconsciously, whether to listen them or not. And even we decide to take a chance on the communicative act, there are various degrees and types of failure that might arise; misunderstandings may be of the following types (D. Beyrich & C. Borowski, 2000):

- pragmalinguistic: when a certain meaning is incorrectly attributed to an utterance;
- sociopragmatic: when the contribution of the other is not deemed appropriate to the situation (such as the use of the wrong register or insufficient or excessive formality).

On the other hand, L.M. Barna (2002) identifies six obstacles:

- assumption of similarity: this encapsulates the belief that communicating is simple because we belong to the human species and share the needs (eating, drinking, sleeping, etc.). We thus neglect the different ways of satisfying them. The notion that there are universal elements common to human nature and usable to automatically understand all persons, is currently not sustainable. Each



- encounter must therefore be treated as a special case;
- linguistic diversity: a problem arising from speaking a language other than your own comes from stiffening with regard to the meaning of a word or phrase. Often people do not realise that a word can have different meanings depending on the connotation or context. The variations of the meanings are very hard to understand and it is easier to deny or dismiss the problem rather than trying to understand it. There are also difficulties arising from different language styles (direct, indirect, succinct, instrumental, argumentative, etc.). It is essential, therefore, for those who are confronted with a language different from their own to be aware that vocabulary, syntax, slang, dialects and idioms may represent obstacles;
 - non-verbal misunderstandings: everyone is accustomed to acting in their own sensory reality, which varies considerably from one geographical area to another and from culture to culture. People see, touch, feel and smell only what they are used to recognising, and abstract only what fits into their frame of reference. In this sense, it is easy to understand how the misinterpretation of non-verbal signals and symbols would be a very strong communication barrier, which arises from reference to different sensory realities;
 - stereotypes and prejudices: stereotypes serve to reduce the threat factor that derives from what is unknown; in this way they make the world more predictable and diminish anxiety. In communication, however, they are an obstacle to mutual understanding because they interfere with one's objective perception of stimuli. They must therefore be recognised and monitored;
 - tendency to judge: the human propensity to evaluate damages possibilities for communication. Rather than trying to understand the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of the person before us, we tend to judge them through our own cultural lenses. This tendency inhibits the mental openness needed to examine the situation from the point of view of the other;
 - anxiety: excessive tension can lead to defensive attitudes (such as distorted perceptions, hostility and introversion), which become obstacles to mutual understanding, also because the anxiety often is often accompanied by some of the barriers already described. Therefore, being able to communicate "well" also means knowing how to manage stress, in order to contribute to the success of the communicative exchange;
 - lack of a communication contract: the communication contract relates to the construction of intersubjectivity between the participants, enabling them to define the situation (through negotiation and the sharing of a series of implicit and explicit assumptions), leading them to build shared meaning. This sharing allows the persons to transcend your "private world" and to reach out to each other.

6. Conclusion

Intercultural communication today responds to a social need, linked to political and economic transformations, mass migration and other factors that have led to global interdependence and to constant and inevitable engagement with many kinds of differences. Currently, taking as read the metacommunicational axiom of P. Watzlawick (1964), "you cannot not communicate", we should also take heed of the fact that "you cannot not communicate interculturally" (Gallagher, 2005, p. 13). Indeed, given the multiplicity of differences and the problematic nature of multicultural encounters, communication is the only alternative to conflict or defensive closure. In its widest and deepest sense, intercultural communication should be seen as

a dialogical interaction, a process of negotiation between frames, where negotiation is a two-way process that confronts diverse interests and undergoes gradual adjustment as mutual understanding (hopefully) advances;



it involves compromises and partial sacrifices of integrity of individual perspectives in order to enhance all requirements in play and achieve points of balance that are recognised by all parties involved. This process [...] never reaches a definitive outcome, but the points of agreement gradually established become the starting point of new negotiating processes (Giaccardi, 2005, p. 46).

And again; communication with the other (not necessarily the outsider or foreigner) demands a prior condition: recognition, or the process of attribution of importance and individuality, the removal of which produces indifference (social invisibility) or contempt. As C. Giaccardi writes (2005, p. 279):

to consider the other as an individual and as a subject is an essential step in intercultural communication, without which, all the factors that might negate our stereotypes, correct our prejudices, make us perceive ourselves to be sharers of a common destiny rather than lined up on opposite sides, simply have no way to emerge.

Identity is in fact is a dialogical structure that is defined by continuous movement between the self and the world and between the self and others.

Similarly, the capacity for active listening is necessary, enabling us to learn something about ourselves that we did not know, as well as to correct our preconceived image of the other and to broaden our perspective on the world. Returning to ourselves after going through the other's perspective is a movement that enriches and liberates. If there is no listening and we are not prepared to review our position, no communication is possible, let alone the ability to resolve conflicts: in fact, to embrace alterity we must be ready to change; we cannot communicate and engage with difference by simply being ourselves. The possibility of coexistence requires some capacity and willingness to meet the other and has a profound moral implication: the need to retain and to lose, to measure up to fears and resistances, but

also to transcend our already given identities (Melucci, 2000).

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