

Education and Intercultural development

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Making the best of cultural diversity: conversational learning

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Social intervention work implies the need to deal and make the best of people cultural, social and professional diversity, in the horizon of democracy through communication (Young, 2002) and voice (Arnot, 2006). This paper is built in conversation between one facilitator of the sessions and one evaluator of the project, which recently ended, who reflect about the use of the project methodology to boost interculturality while simultaneously promoting people self-expression and empowerment. The project addressed here was embodied in the development of awareness sessions. It was aimed at promoting: i) training and the development of intervention skills to boosting social processes of empowerment from a perspective of gender equality as a dimension of people quality of life; ii) processes of reflection-action around emerging leadership(s) in professional contexts, community and family with local leaders and/or professionals in decision-making positions, and citizens in general; iii) the co-construction of a unifying praxis through the interaction among cultural mediators, facilitators and researchers; iv) the theoretical and empirical resources for literacy and gender equality for people development and quality of life, which promotes reflections, studies and practices consistent with communities' empowerment.

«Conversational learning» (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002), a methodology which amplifies and updates Paulo Freire's (1975, 1999) conceptualization of «conscientization», has shown to be a good instrument to develop awareness sessions about shared leadership, quality of life and equal opportunity, with a diversity of groups and in diverse geographical locations, in the Portuguese Northern region.

Northern region. The approach implies a gradual overcoming of contradictions in the Interface between individuals and groups' emancipation and the emersion of human potentialities. Conversational learning is a powerful means to detect and objectify belief systems that are in conflict. In its complexity it implies the use of a chain of conversations within the group which lead people to express themselves and construct new forms of literacy.

Overcoming barriers, tensions and divisions, respecting differences, constitutes itself intercultural learning as it is transferable to other contexts. It allows facing multiple and unique knowledge(s) and reformulate concepts in search of new literacy(ies) which may be valid elsewhere. It implies slowing down the "production" of scientific and technical knowledge and stop to talk about the concrete matters that move us in the world today.

The project involved around 250 participants, who enrolled in awareness sessions of 6 hours. Regarding the promotion of women and men expression and listening, it became clear that through its methodology this project developed and provided interventional actions that boosted strengthening their leadership skills in different contexts, fostering the construction of bridges between cultures on the way to build a more intercultural world. It promoted the recognition of the multiplicity of voices, through the use of communication modes, sustained on an ethical approach to the diversity of people involved. In this sense, provided "white spaces" (Koning, 2009) that allowed for self-reflection in an effort to approach the realities of each person and within a perspective of recognition and 'profitability' of people heterogeneity and individual differences in order to build wider forms of thinking of intercultural roots. The encouragement to inclusive communication, whose pillars emerge from - and reinforce - the linkage between inclusion and democracy, led to the development, and sometimes enhanced, of initiation procedures of exercise of democracy, supported on the political inclusion of diverse knowledge(s) and willing to understand and respect the complexities inherent in the diversity of voices and cultures in presence.