

# **International perspective in national approach to teacher education**

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## **Introdução**

In an era of globalisation how to keep the cultural and national character of education?

Can different cultural approaches benefit the solving of regional/national problems in education and teacher training?

What is the role of teachers in a technological world?

Since the 80s ICET keeps Regional Centres (Africa, Brazil, Peru) whose main objective is the interchange of educational experiences as a response to the above and other questions. In 2003 the Regional Centre in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro) organized a Seminar to discuss some issues related to these problems. As an outcome of the Seminar many interesting other issues were raised. One of them was that such complex questions could not be answered simply by a yes or a no, since the cultural aspects of one reality are not always in harmony with other societies.

Many authors tried to respond to the intriguing and provocative questions mentioned above and it would be interesting to compare the views of different authors on the pre-globalisation era and in the globalisation epoch in which we are living. As a sample two very different authors were chosen for this study: De Tocqueville and Baudrillard, both French, one in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the other a contemporary. The first projects a European view of North American society and presents an almost irreconcilable position between the two cultural identities. As such, the answer to the proposed questions would be negative. On the other hand, Baudrillard considers reality as hyperreality; that is, what is reproduced as a simulation. In his most popular book *America* he classifies American culture as "unreal" and, as such, it depends exclusively of the media. In this context, any solution is possible since, in Baudrillard's view, America equals Disneyland. As consequence, the solutions presented or proposed to educational issues are perfectly adjustable to different cultural realities, since they would be

hyperrealities. It is also typical of Baudrillard analysing society and culture as "unreal" or, in other words, something that is built by its members.

Along the same line of discussing globalisation modern American authors as Frederic Jameson and Stuart Hall present also interesting approach related to the significance of cultural differences.

Frederic Jameson relates cultural reality mainly to linguistic models besides showing in cultural analysis deep influence of Marx and Althusser. Thus, education is a straight reflex of economics and political ideology and if one tries to build a pattern or a typical education out of what Jameson calls "walls around our minds" these patterns would brake into individual concepts. It is not difficult to imagine how this would reflect in the preparation of teachers.

Stuart Hall, in his turn, presents another critical approach to the phenomenon of globalisation. At the same time that one can detect a certain "fascination" towards global homogenising there is also a sort of value of the "regional" or "local". By "local" or "regional" one must not understand ignorance of change or progress or whatever is happening in other cultures, but, to take advantage of anything that can benefit society, keeping national identity.

It must be kept in mind that all the discussions that took place in the Seminar were directed to the utility or educational significance of international organisations like ICET and the Regional Centres. Thus, the thought of Stuart Hall brings to our attention a very interesting point: the "migration" towards the West (or what is considered western culture, economy and

society). The West is not only a geographic concept but a cultural one. In fact, the migrations are frequently from South to North (Africa to Europe, for instance). That means to say that geopolitic or geoeconomical senses have to be considered. It cannot be denied also that technology is significant in such a change. DVDs, answering machines, computers have become part of the household in the so called "Western culture" and are, no doubt, attractive to members of cultures in which such devices are, by any reason whatsoever, not ordinary. The consequences are manifold. On one hand there is the hostility towards the "foreigners" or immigrants; on the other hand, the desire of mingling with the new culture. This may be considered one aspect of the phenomenon once called the "generation gap".

Under this focus globalisation can trigger a defensive reaction developed by cultural groups whose dominant character is being "menaced" by the new arrivals, called by some authors "cultural racism".

Again come the questions: - What will be the role of education in such a problematic context? How are teachers to be prepared to face such a complex and even confused world?

In the first place the role of education in society must be examined. Going back to Durkheim one can see that the task of education is to ensure the preservation of culture and, at the same time, to allow renovation; in other words, progress. A social process that is at the same time conservative and creative is ontological contradictory. Renovation implies in abandoning old cultural products: objects, utensils, tools, habits, a whole lifestyle and, it

goes without saying, values. Would this mean the destruction of culture? Yes, if the process would be just throwing away the so called old. But, this is not the role education should play in society. Renovation has to be a very positive aspect of critical and creative thinking. The new should be selective and not in conflict with tradition in its main aspects: religion, language, family structure, government and even formal education (school system).

The answers to the challenging questions brought forth in the Seminar and related above were almost unanimous in their content: if technology is used as a means and not as an end cultural and national identity may be kept as educational values. On the other hand, if technology is "hyperestimated" or "hypervalued" cultural identity will most probably be diluted.

Coming back to the possible utilisation of different cultural realities to help solving educational problems and consequently, what organisations like ICET could do, the issue has been already solved by the above considerations. Any help would not be a transposition of educational models or a fixed methodological recipe. What ICET could and should do through its Regional Centres is to study national educational identities and exchange successful experiences.

Changes should occur when proven necessary or meaningful and this is the moment when teachers come in to act as the main actors of conservation and renovation.

As an example some almost universal educational issues were discussed in the Seminar: the growing of drug use and violence in schools. And it was found that educators in different cultures face similar problems. For instance: one school in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (State School Gualajara, selected by UNESCO among 1.000 schools and prized for its work) has solved the drug and violence problem by drama and music activities.<sup>1</sup> The drama/theatre playing was also a chance to study language and literature. Music has focused in the African inheritance very present in Brazilian folklore. This particular school has circa 3.000 students (Junior and Senior High) and is located in an area of one of the highest rates of violence. The success of such an experience could recommend it to be applied to other cultural realities exploring their own cultural roots.

Another conclusion: encourage establishing ICET Regional Centres to develop and exchange issues and experiences regarding the preparation of teachers considering global and national perspectives.

This exchange could benefit different educational patterns. In short: teachers should be prepared with a broad cultural background to face the growing of technology and globalisation and not lose consciousness of national and cultural identity. Teachers/educators must be prepared to accept the "other" in the Martin Buber meaning of the "I and Thou".

In Stuart Hall's perspective there is another possible focus of how teachers

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<sup>1</sup> Some materials regarding this school may be seen after the session.

may be affected. Globalisation affects teachers in several ways. The most important are that it goes in parallel with the enforcement of local identities and globalisation develops irregularly having its own "geometry of power". As consequence it may produce new identities. At this point the preparation of teachers could take into consideration other sociological concepts such as *tradition* and *translation*. Tradition is shown by an effort to maintain what is understood by a "pure identity" or, eventually, by the acceptance of some changes around the "pure". Translation is a sort of transposition of the ancient culture. The new is adopted, but, with a sort of nostalgia. Education in such a context becomes something extremely difficult and one must bear in mind that the teacher is also a member of society and the cultural complex. He or she cannot be uprooted or submitted to new models. Notwithstanding, comparing different cultural realities and offering teachers a wide range of educational techniques and even different educational philosophies would be a step towards a better work with their students.

This is the point when ICET Regional Centres may act very positively exchanging experiences.

Summarizing: This short presentation is intended to stimulate discussions among the participants of this Conference mainly in regard to the role of ICET and the Regional Centres in international teacher education.

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