

Rediscovering Education Through Intercultural Dialogue

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“Within the basic context of openness there is a discipline of what to ward off, or reject, and what to cultivate, or accept. The positive aspect of renunciation, what is cultivated, is caring for others. But in order to care for others, it is necessary to reject caring only for yourself, or the attitude of selfishness. (...) In order to overcome selfishness, it is necessary to be daring. (...) But then, once you may have made a leap of daring, you might become arrogant. (...) So the discipline of renunciation also involves cultivating further gentleness, so that you remain very soft and open and allow tenderness to come into your heart. (...) Although the warrior’s¹ life is dedicated to helping others, he realizes that he will never be able to completely share his experience with others. The fullness of his experience is his own, and he must live with his own truth. Yet he is more and more in love with the world. That combination of love affair and loneliness is what enables the warrior to constantly reach out to help others.” (Trungpa 1995: 93, 95-97)

Introduction

“Teachers talk about teachings.

Real teachers study their pupils as well.

Most of all, teachers should be studied.” (Musa Kazim quoted in Shah 1990: 241)

I am very happy to participate in this important reflexion on *Cultural Diversity and Education* in the frame of the drafting of the UNESCO world report on cultural diversity. The six panels of this meeting of experts highlight the multiple facets of the question. Session 1 raises awareness to the need for an education to diversity. Session 2 adresses the fundamental question of translation : how to translate cultural diversity into educational programmes ? Session 3 highlights the stake of multilingualism and insists on the fact that languages are not mere communicational tools but that they are vehicles of values and worldviews. Session 4 underlines the need in our globalizing world to foster critical capacities and to fight against unilateral points of view – it addresses the question

of how to share both diversity and a common ground for our living together. Session 5 reminds us that cultural diversity also plays a crucial role in higher education and research. It is not only about 'conveying intercultural values' to school children in order to make them better 'global citizens'. Session 6 intends to ponder on intercultural skills and teacher diversity guidelines.

I have been asked to contribute in the last session on the development of intercultural skills. As I was pondering on this question, it appeared to me that it may be enlightening not to restrict the reflexion to the questions of the definition of intercultural skills and of their promotion through education. It seemed fruitful to share some seemingly more general insights that arose from my own intercultural learning and teaching experience. This may give us some insights on necessary skills for interculturally oriented education and may further lead to a rediscovery of what education is about. 'Studying' a teacher's experience may teach us something.

I will approach 'education' as part of a learning process and I will decline this process in ten points: trusting, daring, opening up, listening, wondering, rooting, answering, sharing, discovering, learning. Although, I will now present these ten points in the form of ten stages, it should be clear that they refer to basic learning skills that seem especially important in contexts of intercultural learning and that are all interconnected.

In a certain way they are even related to the very basic skills necessary to learn how to learn. We may take the preconditions for learning for granted, but as Khwaja Ali Ramitani noted in a Sufi context : "If we were embarking on the Way anew, my plea would be: 'Teach me how to learn and what to study.' And, even before that: 'Let me really wish to learn how to learn, as a true aspiration, not simply in self-pretence.'" (quoted in Shah 1990: 292).

I will proceed in a rather impressionistic way in order to stimulate our common reflexion. The bibliography at the end of the article will hint to further stimulations for thought. I hope that the character of this contribution as a 'philosophical meditation' will not only further our reflexion on intercultural skills but that it will also allow an enrichment of the more precise enquiries of the other sessions. It may also shed some new light on the nature of education itself as it may be enriched from different cultural windows.

¹ The warrior is understood here in a spiritual sense as someone who opens up to Life.

But before moving to the core of the matter and as we are now in the ‘introduction’, let me quickly introduce myself. Indeed, in order to be able to engage in a genuine dialogue about our very general question it is important to clarify – at least to some extent – ‘where we are speaking from’.

I am an Austrian who has lived in various European (Austria, Romania, France, Germany, Belgium) and Asian (India, China) countries but who has been especially exposed to the French and to the German education and higher education systems and who is now teaching and researching in Belgium, in Brussels. My basic academic training was in law, which led me to further studies in legal theory and anthropology of law. My main concern was and remains to tackle the challenges and stakes of intercultural dialogue in a world that is at the same time one and very diverse. I do this more specifically in two areas: the challenges of intercultural approaches to organize our living together on the global and local planes and the challenges of the meeting of different traditions of knowledge and its implications. The first question crystallized in research on human rights and intercultural dialogue which then expanded into research on ‘Law, Governance and Sustainable Development’ with focus on the intercultural stakes and challenges. The second crystallized in research on the institutionalization of traditional systems of knowledge, and more precisely of Yoga in India, and on attempts to build bridges between Western and non-Western systems of knowledge.

As I am also teaching anthropology of law and a course on ‘Law, Governance and Sustainable Development’ to students that come from all over the world and as I try to promote an intercultural sensitivity in my general work as a researcher I have also been confronted to the question of interculturality from the pedagogic point of view as a teacher. And I should add that since numerous years I am also exposed to the ‘intercultural learning *problématique*’ as a student in my learning of Asian martial arts, Yoga and Indian classical dance in China, India and Europe.

So let me share the insights I gained on my intercultural journey. In a certain way, this journey is a journey of knowledge: “Knowledge proceeds from: ‘What am I?’ To ‘I do not know what I am.’ To between ‘Perhaps I am not’ and ‘I will find myself’; to between ‘I will find myself’ and ‘I am’, to ‘I am what I know myself to be’, to ‘I am’.”, said Abu-Hasan El Shadhili (quoted in Shah 1990: 248). The intercultural learning process runs along a similar path and exhorts this enquiry of who we are.

Trusting

It seems to me that any learning process must start with a basic situation of trust. Trust between the teacher and the student(s), but also between the student and the whole teaching environment. This is a basic requirement for any teaching but it becomes especially important in teaching situations that do not only aim at 'increasing knowledge' but that try to awaken awareness to the limits of our perceptions and knowledge as is the case in intercultural learning situations. This entails that the teaching environment is not perceived as a competition place where the 'best' are rewarded and the 'losers' discarded. It must be perceived as a place where it is not competition but collaboration that is valued, where what counts is not to 'shut people up' through 'superior knowledge' but to learn to listen to others and to accept to learn from them. By seeing others not as competitors or 'voids', but as subjects with interesting things to share and to be discovered², an atmosphere of trust can arise. This in turn may allow people to be off guards and to actually allow real encounters. In many teaching situations, in schools and in universities, there are increasingly culturally diverse classes. By continuously emphasizing that this diversity is potentially very enriching and by valuing the complementarity of differences, students start to trust themselves and the others and thus allow themselves to also become 'fragile', another word for 'open for learning'. The different visions of the teacher or the fellow students although challenging because different, are nevertheless linked to a context where they are not perceived anymore as a threat. It should be added that in every class or lecture room, even if 'monocultural', there are students with different skills and personalities. Highlighting the richness of this diversity and allowing its constructive expression helps to build a basic capacity of trust that is also important in intercultural settings, but that is not reduced to it. Systems of teaching that overtly emphasize one mould over any other (ex: only maths and sciences are the real thing – languages, literature and arts are for losers) go directly against the basic building of trust of the students in themselves, which is the prerequisite of trusting others.

Indeed, unlike what has been stressed in the Western modern tradition, learning is not only about acquiring intellectual skills. It is also about learning to relate to life and to one's experiences of it. In line with the aim of getting people to trust themselves and to trust each other, it is important to relate classroom experiences, as well on the school as on the university level, with 'outside experience'. And this relationship should go both ways. On the one hand, skills and knowledge acquired outside of the learning institution can be valued and can enrich the interactions during the classes. This can help to decenter the perspective on learning and raise awareness to the fact that

learning is not only a school or university ‘thing’ but that these two forms are only two among many others. On the other hand, it is important to relate teaching to the experience of the students and to build bridges between what is transmitted to them and their life experiences.

Daring

When one trusts oneself and one’s environment on a basic level, one can start to dare, to push one’s limits a little further. For some students daring to speak out, to contribute to discussions is already a big thing. This is a more active aspect of daring. But it is as difficult to really start to listen to what the teacher or other students are actually saying. Daring to listen and to accept that one may be destabilized, that one may not immediately have an answer, this more passive daring is also very important. “Knowledge starts with the recognition of one’s ignorance.” Very often only lipservice is paid to this often quoted statement. Ignorance seems to be recognized only so that it can immediately be filled with “knowing”. Not much space for doubt is allowed. Teachers tend to think that they have to transmit contents. And students are often destabilized when they are confronted to a way of teaching where they feel that they do not get clear contents, that they can ‘learn’ in order to ‘pass their exams’. Even science classes or philosophy classes that should sensitize students to ask questions and convey ways of looking for answers to them, often turn into ‘getting the answers’ classes ... This reinforces the idea that there is always one answer and that it can be reached through the right procedure. But what about the questions themselves ? The contexts they arise from ? The person who is asking them ?

Often education, does not dare to teach the students their fragility as human beings – it rather tries to ‘make them strong’. It is indeed important to develop certain precise skills that do make one competent in a given domain. But at the same time it is extremely important to raise an awareness to our fundamental fragility that is actually not a problem but the source of the possibility of learning and growing. As Vachon points out in relationship to the discovery of different legal and political cultures, “The exercise of opening up to another radically different political culture is a very difficult and disturbing one; it requires one to become deeply vulnerable. But it can thus also become a very liberating experience of our own Western political culture” (Vachon 1992 : 11)³.

² For Robert Vachon, pluralism is the awakening to the fact that the other is not a mere object or a term of intelligibility. He or she is a source of selfunderstanding. “It is awakening to the other, not as a void to be filled, but as a plenitude to be discovered.” (Vachon 1997: 7 – my translation).

³ I am translating here the French version of this statement that can be found on page 11 of the French version of this issue of *Interculture*. But the reference in the bibliography is to the English version that is actually a little different.

We should be aware that intercultural dialogue has a very destabilizing effect. Not recognizing this aspect and thus denying it or not addressing it, leads either to avoiding a genuine, challenging, dialogue – which can manifest in fundamentalistic withdrawal in one’s initial standpoint – or to an existential crisis that deconstructs meaning without providing new meaning. This is why I have insisted on trust as the initial condition for genuine intercultural encounters : only in situations of trust can we allow ourselves to die to our certainties within a horizon of ‘‘death’ as transformation’, as only a phase in the learning process. But for the moment it seems that this element is underplayed, as what very often goes under the label of ‘intercultural dialogue’ is no more than a little bit of ‘tourism’.

But, at the moment one takes the intercultural encounter seriously, Robert Vachon (1995a: 71) rightly remarks that “No matter how one tries to evade it or ignore it, one cannot escape it. The shock and the crisis are there. We are beginning, on both sides⁴, to recognize it, but we do not accept it, or we do so faintheartedly. We then seek either to take refuge in our respective fundamentalisms, or to negate the existence of our differences, or to transform or interpret the other according to our own image, or finally to delude ourselves through recourse to reforms, revivalisms and messianic projections. But the intercultural imperative is there, ineluctable, leaping from reality itself (and not only or necessarily from our failings)”. (see also Vachon 1997; Baxer 2007).

Such a new, intercultural, awareness can only emerge in situations of trust and can lead to a more courageous outlook on life – an outlook that does not consist in only seeing the world in one’s own way but in trying to open up to its many dimensions as they are revealed through other’s eyes.

Opening Up

When one dares to go beyond the limits of what one knows, beyond one’s certainties, one opens up to a wider experience of the world and of oneself. This can be very destabilizing. Opening up is not only recognizing that we have little knowledge and that we need more : like a bottle that is only filled to a third and that we open so that we can completely fill it. It may also mean opening up to ways of looking at the world that we may not ever have thought of before. Maybe that from another perspective even the bottle and the knowledge we have poured in it already do not really exist?

⁴ Robert Vachon makes this statement in the frame of the dialogue between Mohawk and Western / Canadian political-legal cultures.

Maybe that, from that point of view, we have to empty the bottle instead of filling it, in order to know? Maybe we have to break it? Maybe there is no bottle?

On a fundamental level, opening up is linked to a basic trust in our existence or to the discovery of 'basic goodness' as Chögyam Trungpa calls it from a Buddhist perspective. "As human beings, we are basically awake and we *can* understand reality. We are not enslaved by our lives; we are free. Being free, in this case, means simply that we have a body and a mind, and we can uplift ourselves in order to work with reality in a dignified and humorous way. If we begin to perk up, we will find that the whole universe – including the seasons, the snowfall, the ice, and the mud – is also powerfully working with us. Life is a humorous situation, but it is not mocking us. We find that, after all, we can handle our world; we can handle our universe properly and fully in an uplifted fashion. The discovery of basic goodness is not a religious experience, particularly. Rather it is the realization that we can directly experience and work with reality, the real world that we are in. Experiencing the basic goodness of our lives makes us feel that we are intelligent and decent people and that the world is not a threat. When we feel that our lives are genuine and good, we do not have to deceive ourselves or other people. We can see our shortcomings without feeling guilty or inadequate, and at the same time, we can see our potential for extending goodness to others. We can tell the truth straightforwardly and be absolutely open, but steadfast at the same time." (Trungpa 1995: 21-22).

Such an opening up allows us in multicultural contexts to recognize that there is not only our own topos from which the world can be experienced. There are as many topoi as people. And on a macroscale, each culture represents such a different topos, such a different window with its own perspective on the world. Opening up thus entails recognizing that there is a plurality of windows and that the perspectives they offer can never be reduced to a single all encompassing perspective. There is no 360° perspective. "Dialogue is fundamentally, opening myself to another so that he might speak and reveal my myth that I cannot know by myself because it is transparent to me, self-evident. Dialogue is a way of knowing myself and of disentangling my own point of view from other viewpoints and from me, because it is grounded so deeply in my own roots as to be utterly hidden from me. It is the other who through our encounter awakens this human depth latent in me in an endeavour that surpasses both of us. In authentic dialogue this process is reciprocal. Dialogue sees the other not as an extrinsic, accidental aid, but as the indispensable, personal element in our search for truth, because I am not a self-sufficient, autonomous individual. (...) Dialogue seeks truth by trusting the other, just as dialectics pursues truth by trusting the order of things, the value of reason and weighty arguments. (...) Dialogue does not seek to be primarily *duo-logue*, a duet of

two *logoi*, which could still be dialectical; but a *dia-logos*, a piercing of the *logos* to attain a truth that transcends it.” (Panikkar 1979: 242-243).

So trusting oneself and the other and opening up are the prerequisites to start to listen, to try to understand the sight offered from another window, to recognize multiculturalism, the diversity of points of views on reality and to become aware of interculturality the relatedness of all these different perspectives.

Listening

Once the existence of different *topoi* is accepted, the question becomes how to relate to them. How can I understand the constructs of another *topos* from my own *topos*? How to understand something that is not moulded in the same universal frame of reference? We have to start to listen. When I say listen, I point to more than the mere fact of listening to the words that somebody may speak. To listen means to resonate with an experience. It can mean to allow oneself to resonate with what somebody says. But it can also mean to resonate with an art that one is practicing, with a life experience that one is going through as for example the sharing of a meal with people from another culture or ‘doing participant observation’ as anthropologists are supposed to ... In Robert Vachon’s words (1998 : 42), “Interculturalism (...) is to experience another culture, to accept the truth of the other culture. It is therefore allowing the other culture and its truth to affect me directly, to penetrate me, to change me, to transform me, not only in my answers to a question, but in my very questions, my presuppositions, my myths. It is therefore a meeting in myself of two convictions. The place of that meeting is the heart (not the head) of a person, within a personal synthesis which can be intellectually more or less perfect. There is no co-existence possible without a co-insistence, i.e. without their penetrating into each other’s heart. It is therefore a matter of approaching the other from inside. It is contemplative listening to the other where one begins to see the possibilities not only of solutions, but of radically different fundamental questions. It is therefore not *cogitating* (*co-agitare: coagitating*) the other, but ‘*connaître*’, i.e. ‘*co-naître*’, be born together, ‘*Esse est co-esse*’!”⁵

By letting these different experiences resonate with and within ourselves an ‘intracultural dialogue’ starts. We realize that there were untapped dimensions in ourselves, that we have more potentials

⁵ See in this context also Vachon’s developments on the dialogical opening (Vachon 1995b, especially 12 ss) and Panikkar’s developments on the dialogical dialogue (Panikkar 1984).

than the ones we have developed so far. As Raimon Panikkar points out (1978: 40), “I shall never be able to meet the other as he meets and understands himself if I do not meet and understand him in and as myself. To understand the other as ‘other’ is, at the least, not to understand him as he understands him-self (which is certainly not as ‘other’, but as self). Obviously this self that understands the other is not my previous *ego* that reduces the other to my own unchanged self. Each process of real understanding changes me as much as it changes the other. Real understanding transforms my *ego* as well as the *alius*. The meeting point (...) is not a neutral dialectical arena that leaves both of us untouched, but a self that besides being myself is also shared by the other.”⁶ This ‘intracultural’ experience arises our curiosity either because it makes us feel comfortable or because it makes us feel uncomfortable. But anyway we have now started to wonder about our own constructs and the constructs of the other ... and the intracultural experience expands into an intercultural journey.

Wondering

Wondering is the next important step. It seems to me that with the ‘communication society’, we may, paradoxically, have lost our ability to wonder. We do not let ourselves really get touched by difference because we have integrated the belief that we know already everything because we know that almost everything exists and that we have seen it on TV or on the internet ... or that we can at least have access to it easily if we wanted. In fact we have been looking at many things, but we may not have really seen them, and even less experienced them (see Le Roy 1999: 387). Wondering is a state of mind that has to be continuously trained and that is very much linked to the skill of openness ... In a certain way, it is its active counterpart.

We have opened up. We have started to listen. Now we wonder about what we hear, about what we experience. The challenge here is not to impose a particular sense or meaning immediately on that about which we wonder. It has taken anthropology a long time to start to recognize that it is problematic to reduce alterity to just difference (see Affergan 1987). After having been intrigued by otherness, we tend to compare it to what we know in order to see how close it is to our own

⁶ From an anthropological perspective, Clifford Geertz (1993 : 24-25) notes : “The tension between the pull of this need to penetrate an unfamiliar universe of symbolic action and the requirements of technical advance in the theory of culture, between the need to grasp and the need to analyze, is, as a result, both necessarily great and essentially irremovable. Indeed, the further theoretical development goes, the deeper the tension gets. This is the first condition for cultural theory : it is not its own master. As it is unseverable from the immediacies thick descriptions presents, its freedom to shape itself in terms of its internal logic is rather limited. What generality it contrives to achieve grows out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions.”

experience or not. Evolutionist theories are a good illustration of this approach. One is intrigued by difference. Then one tries to make sense of it by imposing a frame of comparison where oneself is the reference and to which the others are compared. 'Like us' is equated to 'civilization' and the less the other is 'like us', the more he or she becomes barbarian or savage to refer to Morgan's famous evolutionist classification. Reducing 'otherness' to a position on the scale of differences / resemblances does not allow us to discover the "Other" behind the other and usually leads to his or her ethnocentric, and very often inferiorizing, construction. The other becomes the one 'without' : 'without state', 'without writing', 'without development', 'without human rights, 'without education' etc. We fall into the trap of the *englobement du contraire* or 'encompassing of the contrary' that has been explicated by Louis Dumont (1991: 140-141)⁷. Although explicitly constructing the other as being our equal as he or she is also member of the human family, the implicit point of reference remains us, who are the real, the accomplished, representatives of this humanity. Therefore we fail to recognize the originality of the other and reduce him or her to an inverted image of ourselves.

Even if we have wondered enough in order to reach less ethnocentric approaches, as soon as we stop to wonder we again fall into the trap of essentialism. When we start to think that we have developed intercultural competences, chances are high that we have started to close down to what is actually going on and that we are 'loosing' it. Interculturality is an ongoing discovery, a perpetual wondering, the recognition that the other is not a void to be filled but a plenitude to be discovered, as we have mentioned above – and we may add that this plenitude is ever growing and changing, although it has its own rooting.

Rooting

Interestingly enough wondering is linked to rooting. As we are intrigued and start to explore the wonder of otherness, parallelly, we start to explore ourselves. A diatopical approach deals at least with two topoi. One's own and the other's. By establishing a dialogue between both, the unconscious presuppositions of each of them, their respective mythoi⁸, or 'the things we believe so much that we do not believe that we believe them', become revealed. We start to get aware of our own rooting at the same time that we unveil our partner's rooting. Things that went without saying and had never been questioned before, suddenly appear as only one possible way of looking at

⁷ For more detailed explanantions on the application principle of the encompassing of the contrary in intercultural situations see Eberhard 2002, 98 ss and Eberhard 2003a.

things. Things that we may have discarded before because they were not valued in our worldview suddenly start to take on meaning. It may well be that realities not valued in our culture, although present, had become invisible to our eyes or that we were ashamed of them and thus tried to hide them, as Michel Alliot (2003 : 307 ss) notices referring to legal experiences from an anthropological perspective. In the ex-colonies who took over the Western modern institutions, often the existence of 'traditional law' is downplayed and perceived as embarrassing. Until recently, when it was not simply denied, it was seen as an obstacle to be removed and replaced by modern law and institutions.

By going through the topos to our underlying mythos, by starting to get aware of our rooting, we progressively get a better understanding of who we are in relationship to the others. We start to get aware of our specificity that reveals itself in the dialogue with other specificities. We also start to realize that we actually draw on many roots.

As we become aware of our cultural rootings, we also realize that we carry all different cultural potentials within us. We thus discover at the same time our universal and our particular nature.

But with rooting oneself comes the question of how to bear testimony of this rooting ? How to share it with others and also how to question (*interpeller* in French) the other and his perspective, his beliefs, rationalizations and practices from one's own rooting ? Intercultural dialogue is indeed not about juxtaposing essentialized differences. It is about the creative tension between unity and diversity that is pulsating in all of us.

Answering

Wondering is linked to questioning. Rooting consists in a first exploration of the arising questions. Answering is the attempt to share what one has found. It is also taking responsibility for one's rooting if we think of the latin root of the word responsibility, *respondere*, 'to answer' (see Génard 1999; Eberhard 2008). Linking these two aspects together seems very important to me.

Indeed, in order to have a possibility for intercultural dialogue, we first have to open up and put our own preconceptions aside. We have to go through what we can call a 'relativist' or 'culturalist' phase. If we immediately start to criticize the other, his or her worldview, his or her practices etc.

⁸ On mythos, see Eberhard 2001: 182 ss; Panikkar 1979; Vachon 1995a : 31 ss.

we have no way of resonating with it, of understanding it from within. So it is necessary that at some point we let go – as much as possible – of our own preconditionings. The whole first phase of the dialogue is very much about overcoming one's own resistances, becoming aware of one's ethnocentrism or even racism, starting to discover the possibility of radically different existential choices, partly 'dying' to what one was before the encounter ... without necessarily knowing if there will be a 'resurrection' or 'rebirth' later. It is only once the first cultural shock is over and that one starts to have some understanding of another culture, that a more complex picture of the other and of oneself arises. After **alterity, complexity** emerges⁹. In a same culture there are many different points of views, and so there are in same families and even within one and the same individual. By having started to understand where one is rooted and where the other seems to be rooted, a dialogue on the different options can start. One can for example ask: why is it so important for someone in an anthropocentred culture to put Man¹⁰ in the center of everything? And what implications does this have? Why is it important for someone in an cosmocentred culture not to treat Man as special but to see him as just one among many sentient beings who seek happiness? What are the implications? Why is it important for someone embedded in a theocentric point of view to emphasize God? And what are the consequences here?

These questions may on the one hand point to the fact that to some degree this different sensitivities are present in every culture and in every human being although 'mixed together' differently¹¹. On the other hand they allow for critical dialogue that recognizes the dynamic nature of life and the fact that living is also about change, conflict, heterogeneity, disagreement etc. Introducing complexity is paramount in order not to freeze people in preestablished categories, not to essentialize them in their culture or in any 'way of being'. As Raimon Panikkar (1978: 50) reminds us, "Dialogue does not primarily mean study, consultation, examination, preaching, proclamation, learning, etc.; if we insist on dialogue we should respect and follow its rules. Dialogue listens and observes, but it also speaks, corrects and is corrected; its aims are mutual understanding." It is not a frozen reality but a living process of questioning and answering that reveals all our diversity ... and our contradictions.

⁹ The path between alterity, complexity and interculturality in our encounter with « otherness » that is presented below is developed more deeply in Eberhard 2006a : 15 ss.

¹⁰ Understood as « human being ».

¹¹ To illustrate this point in relationship to the question raised above the reader may have a look at Raimon Panikkar's (1993) cosmotheandric intuition that puts forth a vision encompassing the human, cosmic and divine dimensions of reality. Another illustration of the articulation of different basic options present in all societies but valued differently can be seen in Étienne Le Roy's theory of a tripod Law. Law is seen as resting not only on general and impersonal norms as it is valued in the Western modern tradition, but also on models of conduct an behaviour and systems of lasting dispositions, or habitus, that are emphasized in other cultures (see le Roy 1999: 189ss – for a short presentation in English see Eberhard 2001: 188ss).

Answering may also lead to the recognition that although one may have opened up one's window much wider through the recognition of **alterity** and **complexity**, there still remains a plurality of windows. There always is a dimension of radical pluralism in our lives. And at some point there are also options to be chosen. One cannot speak English and Chinese at the same time. You can know both languages, you can use them in different contexts, you can be enriched by the two worldvisions they convey, you can translate one into the other and thus open up new horizons of thought in the language into which you translate, but you cannot speak both at the same time. So there always remains the necessity to be aware of the fact that everything cannot be articulated together in a new 'supersystem'. By introducing "traditional education" into "modern settings" you transform it, maybe even 'kill' it, and vice-versa (see Eberhard 2006b). But not being able to articulate everything into one system does not mean that there is no possibility for sharing. **Interculturality** arises in-between the windows. It is an important horizon that complements our understandings of alterity and complexity by providing an open horizon of sharing (see Eberhard 2002: 325 ss; 2003b; 2006c).

Sharing

Sharing seems to be primordially an activity and an attitude. To share something with somebody does not presuppose that I completely understand the other or even that I completely agree with him or her. But doing something with him or her, sharing food, listening to music, singing, praying, meditating, dancing, talking, traveling, working, recognizes the existence of this other as well as his or her relatedness to myself. Sharing does therefore seem to be a primordial aspect in all and especially in intercultural relationships. It is a horizon of action that is open in the sense that it does not have to rest on prior presuppositions. The attitude of sharing does not rest on assumptions such as 'we can only share if we speak the same language, if we share the same faith, if we belong to the same culture etc.' Sharing is trusting oneself and thus others, daring to open up to them, listening, wondering, rooting, answering. It is fundamentally anchored not in a principle of non-contradiction where only those who are similar can live together, but in a logic of the complementarity of differences. It is our differences that bind us together as much as the common horizon of sharing. Sharing also entails not only to give, but to accept also to receive. For an intercultural learning process to take place, it is paramount to recognize that nobody has the answers but that all share together their questions, answers and experiences. In the same way that it is also not possible, as mentioned above, to speak two languages at the same time or to live different cultural experiences simultaneously, sharing also implies the patience to accept a rhythm of giving and taking. At

moments we play the other's game, at moments he or she plays ours, and at moments we invent our own new game. This pluralistic outlook is very important as it points to the necessity to recognize that true sharing can only take place if we do not absolutize one form of sharing and disqualify the others. In order for intercultural forums to work, it is necessary that other forums also exist. The school is only one place of learning among others. This should be recognized while thinking of intercultural teaching and it points to the political dimensions of interculturality. Culture is not just 'folklore'. Nor is it something that only has its place in museums, or in 'cultural productions'. Culture encompasses ways of seeing the world, of making sense out of it, of organizing it. Sharing thus leads to the discovery of a 'pluriverse', also as far as education and learning are concerned¹².

Discovering

Through sharing different insights and different experiences one starts to discover ever new worlds and interconnexions. The detour via other cultural experiences gives us new eyes to rediscover what seemed familiar to us. Having been exposed to different surroundings, different ways of living, different ways of learning, one starts to become aware of the 'thickness' of life in all situations (see Geertz 1993: 3 ss). Nothing can be taken for granted anymore. Everything may turn into an object of curiosity stimulating the desire to understand, to explore the rootings of things, their development and their effects. Every universe hides another universe and one starts to understand that we may be living in a 'pluriverse'. One starts to discover that learning is not only taking place in the classroom or from 'authorized sources' but that we are continually placed in situations of learning if we dare to open up to them and to see them as such. If we have learned to learn ...

Taking into account 'culture' as an eyeopener for learning is very helpful and paramount in increasingly multi- and/or inter-cultural societies. Nevertheless, it should be clear that taking into account the cultural dimension should not be equated to a culturalism, an idealist approach to culture freezing it into an abstract system that disconnects it from living practices and that emphasizes a functionalist approach to society where conflicts and their dynamics are underplayed. "To look at the symbolic dimensions of social action – art, religion, ideology, science, law, morality, common sense – is not to turn away from the existential dilemmas of life for some empyrean realm of deemotionalized forms; it is to plunge into the midst of them. The essential vocation of interpretative anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make

¹² See for example *Interculture*, n° 148, 2005, on *The Diversity of Educational Cultures* and Teasdale & Rhea 2000. See also Vachon 1998.

available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said.” (Geertz 1993: 30 – on this question see also Bourdieu 1980; Le Roy 1999)

Learning

All the precedent stages may prepare us to learn how to learn (see in this context Shah 1987), how to grow through all these experiences. This, in my view, should be the primordial stake of education: to create an environment where people can learn to learn, and to provide places of learning that are also ‘dwelling places for wisdom’ (Panikkar 1993a; Eastham 1992). Developing the fundamental skill of learning is primordial, especially in the contemporary world where pluralist situations are on the rise. Western education and science have emphasized certain aspects of the human experience and certain ways to transmit them. Little by little we become aware that there are many other ways to define knowledge, to approach it, to transmit it and to share it. It is not the role of the school or of the University to take over the deepening and the transmission of ‘traditional systems of knowledge’. As we are only starting to discover the implications of what interculturalism really means, it is paramount that intercultural teaching stays linked to intercultural research. Although it is not the universities’ mission to teach traditional knowledge, it should be recognized that there is valid knowledge that is not produced by Western scientific and educational institutions and that this knowledge is not only ‘particular’ in opposition to a Western knowledge that claims universality. It is necessary to start to seriously explore the conditions, challenges and stakes of dialogue with these traditions¹³. From a Western point of view, this can only happen if we have a humanist outlook on education. Schools and universities are not only there to prepare their students for the job market. They are places that should continue, in dialogue with other places of learning, to provide a space for discovering what we are through exchange with others. Schools or universities must resist the trend towards ‘professionalization’ and continue to provide an open space where new paths of critical self-awareness can be explored.

It seems that traditions of interdisciplinarity such as they exist for example in my own University, the Facultés universitaires Saint Louis in Brussels, foster the kind of attitude and develop the skills

¹³ See on these questions for example Teasdale & Rhea 2000. See also Fernet-Betancourt 1998.

that are necessary for intercultural learning and that constitute a good basis for an intercultural opening. François Ost (1997), its vice-rector, remarks :

“One can say that interdisciplinary practice is inscribed in a dialectical perspective that is characterized by relativizing both identities and differences. As it works at the intersection or at the interface of numerous knowledges, interdisciplinarity experiences intercommunication between people. It practices the systematic going to and fro between one side of knowledge and the other. It gives consistence to the ‘in-between’ through which knowledge transits, and where different pretensions clash, cross and sometimes converge, and thus reveals its fecundity. (...) This is the ‘dialogical’ virtue – ethical as much as epistemological – of dialectics : it teaches that the elements in presence (the knowledge as well as the persons: students, teachers, public and private partners of the University) are ‘linked together’, that they are codependent. Contrary to the phantasm of the ‘entire part’ (entire part of knowledge and of power), it teaches that truth is plural and that power should be shared. If identities get relativized, conscious as they are of what they owe to alterity, differences also lose their absolute character: they may bind together as much as they separate. They may unite as much as they oppose. Far from being this no man’s land on whose edges antagonist identities get mobilized, differences rather appear as places of exchange, of ordeals of passage through which identities transit in search of themselves.

But a word of caution : dialectics are not confusion. Dialogue is not *pensée unique*. Here again, it is the logic of the ‘inter’ that prevails. The ‘inter’ is as distant from the ‘pluri’, a simple juxtaposition of differences that confines to in-difference, as it is from the ‘trans’, a dangerous utopia of the fusional community. The ‘inter’ attempts to reconcile fidelity to one’s engagements and capacity to question oneself. This requirement must be applied in the relationships that the university has with its employees, with its students, and with the network of its partners in the political civitas”.¹⁴

¹⁴ « On peut dire qu’à cet égard la pratique interdisciplinaire s’inscrit dans une perspective dialectique dont le trait le plus significatif consiste à relativiser les identités et les différences. Travaillant à l’intersection ou l’interface de plusieurs savoirs, l’interdisciplinarité fait l’expérience de l’intercommunication entre les personnes ; pratiquant le va-et-vient systématique d’une rive à l’autre du savoir, elle donne consistance à l’‘entre-deux’ par où transite la connaissance et fait apercevoir la fécondité du ‘milieu’ où s’affrontent, se croisent et parfois convergent les prétentions en présence. (...) Telle est la vertu ‘dialogique’ - éthique autant qu’épistémologique - de la dialectique : elle enseigne que les éléments en présence (contenus de savoir aussi bien que personnes : étudiants, enseignants, pouvoirs publics et privés extérieurs à l’université) ont ‘partie liée’, l’un n’allant pas sans l’autre. A l’encontre du fantasme de la ‘part entière’ (part entière de savoir et de pouvoir), elle enseigne que la vérité est plurielle et que le pouvoir se partage. Mais si les identités se relativisent, conscientes qu’elles sont de ce qu’elles doivent à l’altérité, du même coup les différences perdent aussi leur caractère absolu : elles pourraient bien autant relier que séparer, unir qu’opposer. Loin d’être ces *no man’s land* au bord desquels se mobilisent les identités antagonistes, les différences apparaissent au contraire comme des terrains d’échange, des épreuves de passage par où transitent et se constituent les identités en recherche.

Mais attention : dialectique ne signifie pas pour autant confusion, de même que le dialogue ne se ramène pas à la pensée unique. Ici encore, c’est la logique de l’‘inter’ qui prévaut : aussi éloigné du ‘pluri’ (simple juxtaposition des différences qui confine à l’in-différence) que du “trans” (dangereuse utopie de la communauté fusionnelle), l’‘inter’ tente de concilier fidélité à ses engagements et capacité de remise en question. Les applications de cette exigence ne

We have concluded here the study of one teacher's experience by embedding it in its wider context. Maybe the next step could consist in studying the places that collectively foster and practice 'inter' approaches, be they interdisciplinary or/ and intercultural in order to highlight the stakes and the preconditions of the establishment of intercultural fora of learning, of spaces where we can dare to open up to otherness and thus to ourselves.

“If you succeed in encasing yourself completely, you may feel secure but you will also feel terribly lonely. This is not the loneliness of the warrior but the loneliness of the coward – the loneliness of being trapped in the cocoon, cut off from basic human affection. You don't know how to take off your suit of armor. You have no idea how to conduct yourself without the reference point of your own security. The challenge of warriorship is to step out of the cocoon, to step out into space, by being brave and at the same time gentle.” (Trungpa 1995: 268-269)

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