Intercultural competence in diverse epistemic contexts

Epistemological pluralism recognizes that there are diverse ways of knowing and that diverse facts can constitute knowledge. Binary thinking and radicalization are challenges of today's intercultural encounters and communication. Media also points to social, cultural, and economic barriers dividing different groups, societies and nations. The conceptual distinction between the East and the West, as well as the Global South and the Global North, is created by power structures and ideas of different values and onto-epistemological understandings of the world.

Education plays a key role in encouraging diverse intercultural relations, encounters and communication, as well as in encouraging the idea and recognition of epistemological pluralism (e.g. Kramsch 2013). Academia, research and teaching can work towards inclusion of different onto-epistemologies, which can explain culturally differing future aspirations, and ideas on development and sustainability, among others.

Intercultural competence cannot be built without questioning who and what is being discussed, engaged and understood. Critical interculturality pays attention to the concepts and categories used in intercultural education and academia (Dervin 2017), such as 'knowledge', 'tradition', 'religion', 'centre', 'democracy' etc., which are concepts that require a critical examination. "Interculturality" in intercultural education can be understood differently in the Global South and the Global North. In Latin America, among others, interculturality debates have been about epistemological justice and epistemological inclusiveness (e.g. Aman 2017), whereas in the Euro-American context, the concept of interculturality has often been taken as a creation of dialogue and understanding between different cultures (e.g. Arasaratnam & Doerfel 2005; Dobbernack & Modood 2013).

Interculturality in a decolonial perspective addresses epistemic injustices, which are often the result of prejudice, marginalization or exclusion of certain social groups or some types of knowledge. The starting point of decolonial studies is an inclusive and transformative approach to knowledge-producing practices, methodologies, and even languages used in debates and discussion. Epistemic injustice occurs when prejudices concerning social identities give less credibility to some than to others. In other words, epistemic injustice occurs when someone refuses to recognize another person or group as a participant in a discussion, deliberation, or inquiry, or when shared conceptual resources put some social groups at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to their ability to communicate and disseminate their information and knowledge (Fricker 2007). This contributes to ignorance by marginalizing those groups' information and knowledge. Epistemic injustice can also occur due to lack of information or knowledge, and it maintains inequalities by excluding some social groups from the institutional production of knowledge. In each case, epistemic injustice gives excluded or marginalized social groups a reason to distrust knowledge-producing institutions.

Many intellectuals from the non-Western world, such as scholars coming from Indigenous backgrounds, have pointed to epistemological injustices in academia (e.g. Cajete 2000; Battiste 2000). Their works can be constructive for developing more inclusive intercultural education and competences. As one of the results of the postcolonial global changes, in 1999 Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith wrote *Decolonizing Methodologies*, which became a monument in global discourse on decolonizing research with the recognition

that "research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions" (Smith 2012[1999], 5). The seminal book by Tuhiwai Smith has paved the way for scholars from the Global South who have felt the need to present their points of view and histories from the inside, and to carry out research differently from the dominant "Western" mode (e.g. Kuokkanen 2007). Moreover, this approach has empowered scholars and citizens to produce and disseminate information and knowledge in spite of, or in response to exclusion and marginalization.

Thinking of interculturality in diverse epistemic contexts can facilitate work towards inclusive interculturality and epistemic justice by developing and co-creating new tools that enable people from different epistemological and ontological backgrounds to participate reflexively in civil society, academia, and decision-making. This allows a deeper understanding of "interculturality" in different societal and epistemic contexts.

References

Aman, R. (2017). Colonial Differences in Intercultural Education: On Interculturality in the Andes and the Decolonization of Intercultural Dialogue. Comparative Education Review, 61(S1): S103–120.

Arasaratnam, L. & Doerfel, M. (2005). Intercultural communication competence: Identifying key components from multicultural perspectives. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(2), 137-163.

Battiste, Marie. (2013). *Decolonizing education: nourishing the learning spirit*. Saskatoon: Purich.

Cajete, G. (2000). *Native science: Natural laws of interdependence*. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers.

Dervin, F. (2017). *Critical interculturality*. Newcastle: CSP.

Dobbernack, J., & Modood, T. (2013). The acceptance of cultural diversity in Europe: Theoretical perspectives and contemporary developments. In J. Dobbernack, & T. Modood (Eds.), *Tolerance, intolerance and respect: Hard to accept?* 1-23. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kramsch, C. (2013). History and memory in the development of intercultural competence. In F. Sharifian, & M. Jamarani (Eds.), *Language and intercultural communication in the new era,* 23-37. New York: Routledge.

Kuokkanen, R. (2007). *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Smith, L. T. ([1999]2012). *Decolonizing methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.