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## **A NEED FOR DIALOGUE TO DEVELOP TOLERANCE**

Experts in the design of educational policies insist that civic education must be grounded in a deep sense of belonging, which, in turn, involves values such as freedom, equality, civility, justice, pluralism and, above all, ensures the development of tolerance in the individual, tolerance which is an essential attribute of a democratic attitude;<sup>1</sup> all these values are pivotal for citizenship and essential for a society to function peacefully. Moreover, these experts emphasize that by developing these values individuals can better participate in the pursuit of social ideals. Tolerance enhances this participation in light of its imperative to recognize the diversity and complexity not only of individuals, but also of different communities within society. It is even possible to say that the safeguard of and the respect for human rights are closely related to widening the spectrum of citizens' participation. These social considerations bear on education. They depend on a thoughtful citizenry. But who really cares whether our students develop thinking? It

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<sup>1</sup> Carmen Gutiérrez Moar, Esther Olveira Olveira, Antonio Rodríguez Martínez, "Sociedad Civil, valores y educación para la ciudadanía," en XXVII Seminario Interuniversitario de Teoría de la Educación "Educación y Ciudadanía" (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Noviembre de 2008) disponible en: <http://www.redsite.es/docu/27site/ad108.pdf>, consultado el Feb 02, 2016.

has become a fashion for marketers to “position” or “brand” the university, desiring to create “professional” market demands, and even to call students “customers.” But what of the reflective or contemplative citizen esteemed by the heritage of “deluded philosophers,” who believed such citizens might have inhabited the *uranus topos* of Plato! The reduction of education to a utilitarian project has its precedent in the work of nineteenth-century editors of the *Journal of Edinburgh*, along with the work of figures such as Lord Henry Brougham and Sydney Smith, who actually sought to replace the supremacy of classical education at Oxford and Cambridge with the “useful” knowledge that provides a trade or a profession.<sup>2</sup>

### **What Citizen for What Society?**

When we examine the objectives pursued by governments, education centers and other institutions which achieve the progress of society, we note that there are always two common elements: one focused on the development of citizenship, and another concentrated on the formation of the youth, so that they can someday fulfill their role as citizens. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the definition of “citizen,” which normally is handled in the declaration of principles typical of the society in which these objectives are expressed.

The academic debate on citizenship-education, and on the question for whom that debate is to be addressed, has an abstract quality. For philosophers the debate inevitably involves the nature of democracy itself. We all know that there are three traditions which contain the concepts of citizenship and democracy: liberal, communitarian and republican. I will summarize the main features of these traditions respectively: 1) as liberalism emphasizes individual rights; 2) as communitarianism covers the social life and the place of the individual in it; 3)

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<sup>2</sup> Avery Dulles, “Newman’s Idea of a University and Its Relevance to Catholic Higher Education,” *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 22 (2002), Article 5, available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol22/iss1/5>.

as republicanism puts emphasis on participation as a fundamental value of a community, built with the cooperation of its members. These perspectives, however, have their limitations since they arguably try to understand the citizen in terms of a static model, completely forgetting that the fundamental characteristic of society is its dynamic nature.<sup>3</sup>

Let's consider, then, the citizen who finds himself today more or less accepted by any one of these traditions. In modern societies embedded in the capitalist and democratic world, the citizen lives under the influence of the labor market and fulfills duties such as the payment of taxes, imposed on him by virtue of his membership in the community, while also endows him with social rights. This definition, however, seems to be exclusive, as it states that the person who is in the labor market is the taxpayer; it excludes, at least, those who dedicate themselves to housework as millions of women do and those young people who still receive classroom training. By the end of the last century, a new conception of citizenship emerged. It emerged out of British political discourse concerning the expectation of the citizen for state service; instead of the traditional models of service to the state, political reformers began to promote other areas of action in both public and private modes of life. According to such an alternative model of the citizen's relationship to society, emphasis on the individual's participation in voluntary activities in his or her local communities is encouraged. This volunteerism especially finds its place in the fields of education and communal security. "In this sense, the citizen gets a role that seemed to have lost, but it is an individual role, lacking elements of collective identification that make you feel part of a community."<sup>4</sup>

In the words of Douglas Hurd, Margaret Thatcher's Minister:

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<sup>3</sup> Jorge Benedicto, *Construyendo la ciudadanía juvenil. Marco teórico para las políticas de juventud y ciudadanía* (Barcelona 2011), disponible en: [http://www.diba.cat/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=f1fcd66f-248d-4d81-a6cd-606cce333a51&groupId=95670](http://www.diba.cat/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=f1fcd66f-248d-4d81-a6cd-606cce333a51&groupId=95670), consultado el Jan 20, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Id., 14.

Active citizenship is the free acceptance by individuals of voluntary obligations to the community to which they belong . . . arises from the traditions of civic duty and volunteer service are central to the thinking of this government and are anchored in our history . . . Freedom can only flourish within a community of shared values, common loyalties and mutual obligations provide a framework of order and self-discipline.<sup>5</sup>

Young people can develop in free, democratic countries where the values of liberty, equality, and civility prevail, together with justice, legality, opportunity, pluralism, and tolerance. By providing the young opportunities to participate in society so as to actualize their potentials as individuals and citizens, free and tolerant societies differentiate themselves from societies that are stifling, closed, and fragmented. Sadly, such is the condition of many Latin American countries, such as my own.

However a society unfolds, it manifests principles which define it. These principles explain how the society, for good or ill, affects other societies. We cannot ignore that more than a third of the world's population suffers from hunger and is marginalized by the development-model imposed by Western culture, a model whose aims are not achievable by some, if not most, societies. Therefore, if the young are to be educated successfully, they must be prepared to relate to diverse societies, not only those defined by the development-model. They must be prepared to interact in communities with a real understanding of cultural differences in a globalized world.

I firmly believe that civic education must be grounded in a deep sense of belonging, which, in turn, involves values which transcend any one of the models mentioned above. Crucial to a progressive citizenship is the cultivation of tolerance, especially as it relates to a democratic

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted after: Dawn Oliver, Derek Benjamin Heater, *The Foundations of Citizenship* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 124.

attitude about social and political life.<sup>6</sup> Tolerance and other values are the pivots of citizenship in a society which is to function peacefully. Moreover, civic education must emphasize the importance of specific values, such as diversity and tolerance, because only by virtue of participating in such values does the achievement of a cohesive social conglomerate become likely.

Diversity and tolerance ought not to be only qualities of the complex relations between individual citizens but between social groups as well. Doesn't it follow that safeguarding and respecting the rights of groups should correlate with the respect of groups. Human rights are closely related to the expansion of the entire spectrum of citizen participation.

Recognizing diversity and complexity as descriptive of individual and social relations forces me to advocate tolerance, which consists, quite simply, of accepting and respecting how others differ from me in their beliefs. But, of course, a cautionary note should be added: to tolerate does not mean to accept the intolerable.

### Need for Dialogue

In my recent work: "Arguing Well, We Build Citizenship,"<sup>7</sup> I said that to be a supportive person one needs to stand in relationship to another, indeed "the other." And tolerance, a virtue *par excellence* for democratic society, is defined by Victoria Camps as a respect for others, the equality of all beliefs and opinions, the belief that nobody has the absolute truth or is always right, this is, the foundation of that openness and generosity that marks the tolerant.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Gutiérrez Moar, Oliveira Oliveira, Rodríguez Martínez.

<sup>7</sup> Corina Yoris, "Argumentando bien, construimos ciudadanía," *Episteme* ns 34:1 (2014): 85–95.

<sup>8</sup> See Victòria Camps, *Virtudes públicas* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1996).

Tolerance involves the acceptance that the “other” has the right to coexist with me. It also entails the respect for the existence of minority groups which may or may not differ from my interests.

Therefore pluralism is a fundamental value of democracy and the concept of majority, usually checking unlikely, can not serve as justification for the imposition of a single thought or behavior for not to annul this plurality. Indeed, tolerance becomes relevant and has its starting point where the common interest or coincidences terminate.<sup>9</sup>

Societies that profess Christian values, whether in crisis or in development, are obligated to respond to a transcendent vision of reality, human person, and Christian moral and ethical values.<sup>10</sup>

By democracy we understand a method or set of rules and procedures to form the government and to bind political decisions.<sup>11</sup>

Putting it in these terms, tolerance is characterized by the fact that a democratic regime has a variety of value positions. It is precisely the lack of acceptance of diversity that spurs confrontation. As Norberto Bobbio maintains, democracy is not a space inhabited by those few who enjoy exclusive rights to the truth. Quite the contrary, to inhabit a democratic space is to be surrounded by a cosmos uniquely defined by a multitude of opinions. We find ourselves in the presence of—as Karl Popper puts it—an “open society,” which is opposed to a “closed society” which encompasses totalitarian spaces of every sort.

Several authors maintain that, tolerance appears in stark contrast with belief in “absolute truths,” which leads that everyone regards only his own belief as true. Accordingly, each of the many “truths” existing within a democracy has relative value. In other words, there is the possibility for diverse interpretations to coexist peacefully, and their en-

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Tulio Álvarez, “El canto de la espada: una visión sobre la resolución de los conflictos a la Luz de la Sagrada Escritura,” *ITER Humanitas* 13 (Enero–Junio 2010): 11–43.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*.

<sup>11</sup> Isidoro H. Cisneros, *Tolerancia y Democracia* (México: Instituto Federal Electoral, 2001), disponible en: <http://biblio.juridicas.unam.mx/libros/libro.htm?l=505>.

counter is beneficial, exactly because no one is in possession of the ultimate truth. By permitting all different viewpoints to be freely expressed, tolerance contributes to reciprocal knowledge, that is, “mutual recognition” through which partial truths may be overcome, and a more comprehensive truth—in the sense of accomplishing agreement among the parties involved—may be crafted.<sup>12</sup>

To speak in defense of tolerance by referring to partial truths is something worthy of careful analysis. Cisneros rightly contends that freedom of expression will make it possible to go beyond “partial truths.” In defending those truths, we can often fall into radical relativism. We frequently hear expressions which echo the phrase: “this is my opinion; this is my truth; you, guys, keep your own.” Thereby it is taken for granted that truth is relative to every individual. But is relativism even plausible?

Those who espouse a relativistic position with regard to the truth—and therefore, with regard to tolerance—maintain that man can know the truth. Yet at the same time, they profess that no truth enjoys absolute value. Truth can only be called such if it dwells within a given space/place, at a given time/epoch/culture. In other words, no truth is universally valid, but it always depends on the representing subjects’ specific constitution.<sup>13</sup>

The apology currently awarded to tolerance is often an admission of relativism. There are renowned politicians, lawyers and even moralists devoted to progressivism who are obstinate in repeating that if you are not a relativist then you cannot be tolerant. Now, people who think this way are not actually as humble as they seem to be at first sight. They ascribe to themselves a monopoly on the moral virtue of tolerance, thereby absolutely—and not relatively—denying it to those who disagree with them. They do not possess enough humility to tolerate others who may think of themselves as tolerant yet without supporting

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. *id.*

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Antonio Orozco-Delclós.

relativism. And in fact, such supporters of relativism cannot be relativists at all. This is because their relativistic claim is not relative, it is evidently absolute.<sup>14</sup>

To appreciate these observations, contextualize considerations of tolerance within a hypothetical debate or contentious dialogue. Could we seriously say that, in order to be tolerant, we must accept all opinions voiced during such a dispute? Of course not. One can be discriminating about the truth content of a discussion and still be tolerant. Is, then, openness to dialogue a necessary condition for judging truth claims? When in a society, discrepancies arise, then calls for dialogue are issued. Dialogue, however, is almost always promoted as a grand illusion forged by extrasensory powers which should lead to the longed coexistence in any group where there are big differences. It is emphasized, *ad nauseam*, that dialogue will succeed only if the interlocutors have the will to understand each other. That is, we resort to a kind of voluntarism which ultimately produces long periods of frustration and despair which ends up with saying: "Or there is dialogue or no understanding is possible with you."

In most cases, those who want "to facilitate the dialogue"<sup>15</sup> find it difficult to obtain an agreement at all or in a short time. Why are the agreements which benefit an entire society not achieved? To answer this question, what is needed is an analysis of the causes of the problem which leads to serious differences between the actors of the dialogue. Unfortunately, those in power do not assume responsibility concerning the dialogue and deepen the mistrust. That is why, what follows with a

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<sup>14</sup> Antonio Millán Puelles, *El interés por la verdad* (Madrid: Rialp, 1998), 143.

<sup>15</sup> In order to promote a successful dialogue, Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst, creators of the pragma dialectic vision of Argumentation Theory, have undertaken an attempt to develop a code of conduct in dialogue. The pragma dialectics assessment of an argumentative discourse aims to determine which of the speech acts can be implemented to solve different opinions. For this purpose, it is essential to clarify what obstructs or hinders an argument. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst have formulated ten rules to be observed to regulate a critical discussion.



relative easiness is that serious dialogues end up with blaming the party in power for irresponsible behavior.

Secondly, it is desirable to distinguish between dialogue about divergent activities or interests and dialogue about disparate values. According to Minton and Schneider, values refer to the goals or objectives that people strive to achieve in order to meet a need; activities reflect the interests and objectives through which the goals are achieved.<sup>16</sup> We may accept the definition of values given by Luis Villoro in his *Power and Value*,<sup>17</sup> describing foundations of political ethics. This text states that values articulate elements of communal life, which can be described in terms of rules, customs, and ideals.

The interest could be “negotiable,” but not the values. Thus a negotiating dialogue can be successful in a conflict of interest, but in a conflict of values it becomes limited. Hence, we aspire to share the values of peace, democracy, and freedom; however, economic interests are negotiable. When this difference is not taken into account, dialogues are not really dialogues any longer.

At this point, we should emphasize that education ought to be, as a matter of principle, education in and for freedom. After all, freedom is a necessary condition for tolerance. Only those who understand freedom will champion it for themselves and others for the sake of tolerance. But such awareness requires maturity and preparation. It requires defining the rights of citizens by establishing the limits of the rights of mine and yours, by fostering discussion about the individual and the common good.

Dialogue, debate, common good, tolerance—these are all indispensable in the search for healthy human relationships, centered on Christian values which should be our moral compass.

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<sup>16</sup> See Henry L. Minton, Frank W. Schneider, *Differential psychology* (Prospect Heights, IL: Wave-land Press), 1980.

<sup>17</sup> *El poder y el valor. Fundamentos de una ética política* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1997).

**A NEED FOR DIALOGUE TO DEVELOP TOLERANCE****SUMMARY**

The authoress claims that civic education must be grounded in a deep sense of belonging, which, in turn, involves values such as freedom, equality, civility, justice, pluralism and, above all, ensures the development of dialogue and tolerance in the individual, dialogue and tolerance which are essential attributes of a democratic attitude. Tolerance and dialogue are the pivots of citizenship in a society which is to function peacefully. She concludes that by developing these values individuals can better participate in the pursuit of social ideals.

**KEYWORDS:** tolerance, dialogue, values, society, education, citizenship.