

Making the invisible visible in human encounters. Code, Identity and Intercultural Education ¹

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Summary

Intercultural Education, in my opinion, has as one of its main goals to make the invisible visible in human encounters. The invisible relates to the meanings of communication that are implicit for individuals or groups, thus, one of the premises for communication to take place is to grasp the implicit in human meetings. Individuals and groups use different codes to communicate. Code can be seen as an unwritten agreement that is tied to various social, linguistic and cultural contexts in which individuals or groups shape their identity. Identity then is developed through a process that takes place in interactions with significant others within the contexts which individuals and groups reside in, search for, or face. Codes are linked to

different discourses and doxa. Discourse can be seen as language in use within a specific group. Doxa is the mental representation of how the social world is and how it should be.

In this article, by illustrating with examples from my research, I will shed light on how a teacher or instructor can have a more rewarding exchange towards bridging cultural, social, and linguistic differences if they are aware of the various codes and doxa used by their students in different situations.

Key words: Intercultural Education - Code - Doxa - Identity - Discourse.

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Introduction

Intercultural education has developed from the diversity that exists in the educational context. This diversity is mainly caused by international migration, the cultural globalization of the world and the people who flee because of war or persecution. Gorski (2010) believes that intercultural pedagogical practices often fail to take sufficient account of the existence of different social and political hierarchies. This can be rooted in the fact that many teachers are unaware of the socio-political context within which they operate and what this means in relation to their own practices. Such awareness as well as the sentience that people are brought up in different contexts and may have different perspectives or values are key requirements for successful meetings between individuals and groups to take place at all. Thus, raising consciousness about the socio-political context among educators becomes a way to make the invisible visible in human encounters.

To show or hide what you express is the title of a study I carried out in Barcelona (Borgström, 2006). In this work, I studied how young Moroccans who are socialized in different languages and cultures express their identity in the face of values that characterize the Spanish society as well as their parents' Moroccan cultural heritage. What distinguishes these worlds (the Spanish and the Moroccan) includes religion, language and ways of seeing life and seeing the world, among others. In

addition, there is a historical relationship between Morocco and Spain. As it is known, the Muslim Arabs and Berbers occupied Spain for four hundred years. Up till today, it has been because of this historical fact that there exist many prejudices about *the other* from both Spanish and Moroccan perspectives. In Morocco, the word 'burka' denotes second-class Spaniards and Europeans. In Spain, Moroccans or Berbers are referred to as 'Moros'. The word 'Moro' derives from the Latin 'Maurus' and was originally a purely geographical denomination, that is, it was used to designate the people who inhabited the Roman province Mauritania Tingitania. Today the term 'Moro' expresses feelings of threat and is based on the image of *immigrant* and *fundamentalist* as being the same (Dieste, 1997:33).

The images that many Spaniards have of 'Moro' reflect a kind of collective consciousness and are manifested in daily life through the mass media, in politics, in labor relations and in the different contexts in which one interacts. The ethnic image and ethnic stereotype of the Moors are combined in a simplified stereotype: it is not the same to be a millionaire from the Persian Gulf as to be a Berber or Arab from Morocco.

The adolescents who participated in the study must constantly find strategies to respond to their environment. What strategies they choose depend upon the situation they live in or what position they are awarded in the social context in which they are immersed. These strategies often involve a choice between showing

or not showing what they think or who they are –ultimately, a choice about how they portray themselves to others (Borgström, 2009).

Such a choice clearly affects the individual's identity. Identity is developed in social interaction in which individuals internalize culture and construct their self-image and the identification with significant others. A culture's value system is the set of beliefs and social rules that exists within a culture, and is conveyed and maintained primarily through language (Schieffelin, 1990). Last, language is the tool or mediated action that the individual uses to communicate with others, to think, and to internalize different cultural worlds (Vygotski, 1978, Wersh, 1988).

The survey data for this study were collected in groups of four, in which participants could converse on various topics such as leisure, family, future, and school. The discussions were filmed, and the young people could speak the language they of their choice (Arabic, Berber, Catalan and Spanish). It should be noted that in Barcelona, both Spanish and Catalan are normally spoken.

One of the groups I studied was comprised of fourteen- fifteen-year-old girls. They came from various Moroccan cities such as Casablanca, Tetuan, Larache and Tangier. All of them -except for Ema who had had her schooling in Barcelona- had attended elementary, middle or high school in

Morocco. The girls talked about marriage and during the conversation they switched between Spanish and Arabic. This is a strategy that young people use and involves much more than just changing the language. The following dialogue is an illustration; the phrases written in bold represent the girls' dialogue translated from Arabic.

The conversation is about what they intend to do in the near future. Ema starts the conversation in Arabic and asks another girl in the group,

'Will you get married?'

The girl is surprised, so Ema repeats the question in Spanish adding,

'If it applies to me, if I'm getting married, and my husband continue to study. And... he would say to me that I had to stay home, or that I should not study, I would go home and would continue to study. And you, what should you do?'

A girl answers, *'I can not do anything.'*

Ema then asks, **'To work or study?'**

All the girls respond in Arabic that they intend to study. One says that she will study medicine. When she says this, the other girls laugh out loud. The conversation continues.

'But if you want something, (would) your mother allow it?' Ema insists.

The girl replies that she believes so. To what Ema counters, **'When you are big and want to continue to study, your dad to say no.'**

Then the girl responds, **'No, no, he will say to me that you can do this ... but not that. He will give me advice.'**

Ema then enquires of each of the girls, **'And what will you do?'**

All of them answer similarly, **'I will do what I want fixed on the sly.'**

One girl says, **'She plays us! There is laughter and noise.'**

Another participant says, **'I swear that she plays this out.'**

Another asks, **'Has this been recorded?'**

The above conversation is interesting in several ways. Ema, who has lived in Barcelona since she was three, says here that she will not bow to what her husband thinks. I see that she is trying to provoke her peers who have been living in Barcelona for a short time. She opposes the unspoken values, i.e., the doxa that pervades among certain groups of Moroccans that women must bow to the authority of men. When the other girls state that they will read or work, Ema enquires of one of them who intends to study medicine if her mother will allow for it. At the girl's affirmative reply, Ema shows disbelief, since she thinks this does not reflect reality and she knows that parents have a different opinion on the matter. Then, she keeps on asking the other girls whose responses are much alike and could be summarized in, 'We will do what we want fixed on the sly'. My interpretation is that the girls intend to do anything to get their way, but do not want others (their parents, the environment) to know.

After the discussion, the young girls express the fear that what they have just said has been recorded. Their comments express that they are not always able to openly say what they really want, and they do not feel safe even though they have said some sentences in Arabic. There are more examples like this conversation in my research on young Moroccans in Catalonia (Borgström, 2006).

In particular, the girls frequently switched to Arabic and used it as a sort of secret language in the focus group meetings. This could be interpreted as a

youth phenomenon, but these Moroccan girls tend to switch to Arabic right when they say something they know is not culturally appropriate. I believe that they know that their home is a certain doxa, that is, a set of ideas, traditions and beliefs that parents want them to follow suit. Therefore, they convey that they do not always follow their parents' advice but they do not say this overtly, instead, they turn to Arabic. To me, this is a clear example of *floating doxa*, in other words, these girls start to move away from their parents' doxa at the time they fear that the conversation is being recorded. This can be interpreted as mistrust of their parents as well as of the representatives from the social majority; in this case those who summoned the group and conducted the interview.

How is doxa related to discourse?

Doxa is, according to Plato, a belief, an idea or an opinion. Doxa is made up of ideas and representations that are present everywhere at all times and it is so natural it becomes invisible; which is the reason why these beliefs are not verbalized and only expressed in discourse through indirect references.

When a person grows up in contact with different ethnic contexts, as in the case of the Moroccan youngsters in Barcelona, they are aware of the existence of different doxa. Whereas their parents carry the ideas and beliefs in their own cultural baggage from their country of origin, these girls find a new way to relate to the outside world, a distinct doxa that their parents are unfamiliar with.

Bourdieu (1977) uses the term *floating doxa* to refer to a situation in which an individual stands between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The former pertains to correct social behavior; the latter is a deviation from this. It is worth highlighting the young people in the study are regarded differently depending on the standpoint of their parents or the social majority. Doxa, values and discourse are interconnected. Doxa is related to norms and values which are the very guidelines of life. Values are moral principles which are continually modified and transmitted from generation to generation. Every culture holds values about what is good and evil. Values then generate norms that provide general precepts for expected behavior. The members of a certain culture tend to agree with some normative values often without much reflection upon them.

When individuals are actively involved in interactions with others in different social contexts, they use various social, linguistic and cultural codes. Codes can be seen as a symbolic system which changes depending on the circumstances. Symbols are important structural units that are the outcomes of linguistic, cultural and social relations. The Moroccan youths in my example above are aware of the various codes that apply to different situations. In interaction with others, they use different strategies by which they show who they want to be and which identity they want to highlight depending on their position in the group and on whom they want to identify

with. Thus, they do not explicitly express what they think and judge in front of the interviewer when they speak Arabic among themselves.

In this sense, doxa refers to the established beliefs of the social system, unquestioned truths that cannot even be debated under the parliamentary system framework. Based on the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977), it is -in my view- reasonable to suggest that different cultural systems have a language of their own and create discourses that perpetuate some aspects of the social system under cover. In this case, the definition of discourse can be compared to Gee's (1990), for whom the language in use within discourse comprises both linguistic and social practices within a particular group such as behaviors, values, perspectives, clothes, habits, among others.

As it has been shown in the interview example, code-switching not only denotes different psychological and social constraints, but also the participants' perceptions of what is given and permitted by their meaning. Discourse sets standards, determines how individuals should relate to a specific phenomenon or a particular point of view, and also affects language and everyday life to a great extent (Foucault, 1997).

Consequently, doxa is manifested through discourse that is so dominant and taken for granted that it is minimally, if at all, questioned. As discourse also comprises symbolic power relations that arise among the participants in all linguistic communicative situations, thereby it is possible to link doxa with discourse (Bourdieu, 1977, 1999).

In this line, discourse may be seen as a set of related expressions, statements and concepts, such as moral, scientific or religious. The French historian of ideas Michel Foucault claims that discourse can be regarded as unspoken, often unconscious structures that guide human actions (Foucault, 1993). This is central to Foucault's idea of language as a social meaning-bearing unit, and the sphere in which power is constitutive and constituted.

In the context of contemporary globalization, there has been a great deal of discussion about a new design, and it proves increasingly important to show what the various discourses express. Lorentz argues on the monocultural discourse in modern Sweden constructed from a linguistic and cultural context, and how it affects teachers' attitudes in their educational activities (Lorentz, 2007 and 2009). This linguistic reality is constructed from a monocultural, ethnocentric and discriminatory reality (Dalgren, 2010). This means that the dominant discourse on multiculturalism includes some individuals that conform to the standards, while others are excluded. The *others* are considered *outliers* and *different*. Perhaps, this is the reason why the Moroccan youths do not want their ideas to come to light. They do not want to be excluded neither by their families nor by the dominant group –in this case, the Catalan society. Awareness of the different discourses that prevail at home and in society compels these adolescents to edit what they say openly or to speak with great caution about what

they think and feel, and often switch to Arabic while doing so.

Elmeroth (2008) believes that monocultural discourse gives rise to what she calls an *ethnic power structure* which means that those who have an origin other than Swedish are considered as deviant from *normality*. Likewise, the Moroccan youths themselves are deviant from *normality*. One important distinction is that they also differ from *normality* at home (Borgström, 1998). Code-switching is thus a strategy to deal with their dual situation.

Foucault (1983) sees the conceptual pair normality-deviation as discursive constructions. He puts forward that when society defines the boundaries of the normal, the abnormal underlies its discourse constructions. The dichotomy normal/abnormal places a negative emphasis on the difference –hence, the tendency to exclude what is judged as deviation from conformity. This in turn is perpetrated in discourse and transmitted through social interaction.

In my view, making the monocultural discourse visible is a way of materializing intercultural education.

Code, code-switching and identity

Code can be defined as an agreement that is linked to various social, linguistic and cultural contexts in which individuals or groups forge their identity. The youngsters who grow up in a multicultural context use code-switching for varied purposes. In the example above, the Moroccan youths alternate between languages so as not to overtly express their opinions.

The term code-switching in my research involves switching between different languages and cultural codes among young people raised in a multicultural context. Code-switching is also something that many of these youngsters use as an identity marker (Borgström, 1998 and Goldstein-Kyaga and Borgström, 2009). For example, when the adolescents begin to recite the Quran in Arabic in the middle of a conversation conducted in Spanish, I regard it as a way of portraying themselves as Moroccans.

The project 'Globalization and Identity' that I carried out with Katrin Goldstein-Kyaga organized seven group discussions with Swedish-born youths of different foreign backgrounds – or the so-called *second generation immigrants* (Goldstein-Kyaga and Borgström, 2009). Code-switching was one of the prevailing strategies, since most participants pointed out that they could get in and out of different cultural, social and linguistic contexts by switching between different languages and codes, as we see in the example below. Moreover, they seemed to have developed an ability to see things from different perspectives, *'It can be a strength if you have the ability to understand the others' situations and to apply different filters.'*

In another example, it is noticeable how the participants strategically make use of code-switching to their advantage.

I've always felt privileged, knowing two different ways of seeing the world. No problem. Argentines do not like the Brazilians

and vice versa. I see it and use it to my advantage. When you meet some people you know you cannot say certain things, because otherwise it becomes a problem.

Many of the young people we interviewed are included in a multi-ethnic context in which the change between different languages and cultural codes is the usual practice. For most of them, code-switching is so obvious that they do not even think about it. It is simply part of their identity.

Language and identity are linked in several ways. Language plays a fundamental role in the preservation of identities. Individuals define themselves and are defined by the others through language. Their way of speaking reveals and communicates their cultural affinities.

The transmission of traditions and customs from one generation to the next is also largely accomplished through language. Language is *the mediated act* by which the individual creates his own meanings through interacting with others in social situations. In this sense, the availability of several languages allows access to different ways of seeing the world and to different social rules for communication. This allows the individual to take part in various cultural contexts more easily. Proficiency in several languages makes it possible to perceive the underlying nuances of the diverse cultural situations. Learning a language entails learning the linguistic structures that are inherent in the language and learning how to use the language appropriately by interpreting the meaning of social interactions in a specific context (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).

Using the target language in social interaction entails coding and decoding key information about the socio-cultural worlds, beliefs and ideologies that apply to the context in which they are originated (Gee, 2005). Through code-switching individuals may be included in or excluded from the community, depending on whether they have mastered the languages and codes (Heller 1998).

When language is the most important dimension of a group identity, code-switching can be used to confirm or maintain such an identity. Latin American youths in Sweden blend Swedish and Spanish in their conversation shaping a positive identity and agency to the Swedish Latino group. Instead, those who turn to speak only Swedish are dismissed from the group.

Switching between languages is part of a larger context of identity markers, where young people can express their individuality by speaking a combination of languages among them. This way, words, gestures, jokes and irony may be the secret codes that show that “we belong to the same group” (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986:11)

Code-switching and changing perspectives

In the multi-cultural spaces that have arisen as a result of globalization and migration, it becomes increasingly important to be able to switch between different cultural codes. Hannerz (1992) argues that small-scale societies are

characterized by the fact that they are culturally homogeneous in the sense that people think in a similar way throughout their lives. In contrast, complex societies are characterized by the failure to share the same cultural meanings, and individuals have to develop approaches to dealing with cultural diversity. Bridging this gap becomes crucial in a globalized complex society, which requires people to learn to switch between different cultural codes.

Code-switching means not only switching between languages but also switching cultural codes. When you shift languages, change often applies to behavior as well. As an illustration, Maria refers to her Swedish husband who has lived in Buenos Aires for eighteen years and not only speaks Spanish without an accent, but he changes his behavior when interacting with Argentines. Thus, he gesticulates wildly and uses different gestures from the ones he may use when speaking with his Swedish counterparts.

Yasmine, a girl who attended one of the focus groups at a secondary school, describes a similar situation. Born to an Egyptian father and a Swedish mother, she speaks Arabic, Swedish and English at home. Sometimes this can lead to amusing complications, but on the whole, she sees the mix of languages as something positive that gives her a greater cultural understanding and sense of belonging to different countries simultaneously. This girl shows a self-assured identity and experiences the multi-cultural environment in a positive light. Although she does not speak Arabic

fluently, she feels at home in Egypt, 'If I'm in Egypt so it is them who are my people, and where do I belong'. At the same time, she feels at ease in Sweden, since to her it is 'very beautiful and incredibly comfortable to jump between different cultures'. In brief, she has gained an understanding of different linguistic, social and cultural codes in diverse situations, even if she does not fully master all the languages; which she recognizes as a pleasant experience.

When you grow up in a multicultural environment, the transposition of values taken from the different cultural contexts contributes to a meta-knowledge which, in turn, fosters openness and the ability to see things from diverse perspectives and to understand the different.

The research project 'Globalization and Identity' (Goldstein-Kyaga and Borgström, 2009) shows that those people who are brought up or have contact with a multicultural context develop a third identity. This identity is a transnational identity, which is neither inclusive nor exclusive; it is a kind of a cosmopolitan identity. The cosmopolitanism that these young people have developed could be called genuine cosmopolitanism (Hannerz, 1996). It is a *both-and identity*, as one girl asserts, 'Still, I refuse to be anything half way. I am one hundred percent so and one hundred percent so. I'm both'. There is an identity in which the *self* is determined by the acceptance of different origins

(such as being Swedish and Armenian) or which seeks to integrate different aspects that can sometimes be contradictory (such as touching or refraining from touching someone in formal greetings). People with such identities can resort to code-switching and construct their identity in both global and local contexts.

This third identity that young people develop could be explained by the fact that they have grown up with many different cultural belongings from the very beginning. They might come from heterogeneous environments, for example from parents with different ethnic backgrounds; or they might have grown up in a homogeneous environment (both parents share the same origin) in a foreign country. In their experience, their upbringing has brought them in contact with other ways of thinking and being (Hannerz, 1996). The young people involved in transnational networks are influenced by their global contacts in several ways through travels, relationships, jobs, and information and communication technologies (ICT). They are bound to establish relationships over long distances in the short term; which is an expression of what I call *globalchaft*. This way, the youths are equipped with language skills, cultural competence, and often an openness to and curiosity about greater cultural diversity. In short, the third identity is about developing those useful skills to interact in a global context, and it is precisely this aspect that is leading to greater cultural understanding in general. The ability of youngsters to adapt their behavior and feel at ease in different places and countries is increasing. A girl with Assyrian roots puts it as follows:

I with my Assyrian culture are more likely to blend into other cultures than maybe what a Swede have. A Swede, who has lived in Sweden, which has a thousand-year-old ancestors, which is a bit like this homogeneous, so I have easier to blend into other cultures. I noticed that in South Africa. There I was with a Swedish girl from my school.

In South Africa it was quite different than in Sweden and the United States. There were many cultures. The actual way to see the man was ... well, you simply had very different values. She had big problems, so she did not understand the professors, and I do not think she liked it so well, I think that maybe I did. I think it's because I have my view, yes, because I come from a different culture, perhaps. Yes, I know this.

Growing up in different ethnic, social, and cultural contexts and integrating diverse values can allow for shifts of perspective. Being able to see things from different angles, to *change perspective*, can be seen as sort of a meta-knowledge that may arise in situations where many cultures meet (Goldstein Kyaga & Borgström, 2009).

There is a kind of meta-knowledge that can be developed in multicultural environments and created within a specific context in which people interact and make meaning. The postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1994) refers to these contexts as the *third space* which can be seen as the contexts in which different cultural expressions are brought together and clash.

This type of knowledge or insight occurs when one is forced to integrate into diametrically opposed worldviews.

This leads to having to raise themselves to a level where the opposing viewpoints are integrated, for example, whether to thank your host for the meal or not. Both behaviors can be an example of civility. Thanking the host/hostess is a courtesy expression in some cultures, whereas thanking at the end of the meal is offensive in some cultures as it involves questioning the person's hospitality. This realization leads to an understanding that others may have dissimilar behaviors for the same communicative purpose.

The development of identity in a multicultural context forces individuals to see themselves from the outside and entails challenging their own attitudes. Shaping one's identity is all about learning to master the symbolic systems one is part of, to become aware of one's place in and between different cultural systems, and often to decide to take control over one's identity.

Many young people who find themselves in this situation can build bridges between groups of people with different world views. Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1999) points out that people with diverse cultural backgrounds can be great bridge builders. This can be simply because they cannot be said to belong to either this or that culture. A girl from the Assyrian / Syrian discussion group developed this theme in the following manner.

I just wanted to tell you this as you said we would belong to Western civilization just because we are Christians, I do not think of. We have much more in common with Muslims, for many years, we have colored an awful lot of their culture. It is, in principle, that we go to different places and ask, but we are very similar.

Being able to change perspective is to view things from different angles. This could lead to an increased understanding of cultural contexts, and it is a capability that many young people possess and should be taken seriously by society.

Making the invisible visible in human encounters

Making the invisible visible in human encounters is a two-fold process which encompasses making your meanings clear to one's interlocutor and understanding the invisible structures that underlie different discourses. This, in turn, means that the individual should first be aware that the other actors participating in the communicative situation do not have the same values or use the same social, linguistic and cultural codes.

In order to understand the context, the individual must be knowledgeable about the conditions she or he lives within. The young people who have grown up in multicultural environments and have developed a third identity know how to behave according to the context of situation. Then, they can come in and out of distinct cultural, social and linguistic contexts because they are aware of the different modes of behavior in different cultural settings. These skills are explicit, that is, they have visibility to the participants, who can become bridges between people with different views.

In many contexts, young people use what might be called open and closed discourses. They make use of open discourse when they dare to be open within a group or a society. In contrast, young people resort to close discourse when they avoid saying overtly what they think and feel in deference to the dominant group. This is the case of the Moroccan adolescents in Barcelona who used this strategy in the focus groups. On the one hand, the youths wanted to detach themselves from their parents' doxa and become closer to the Spanish society's doxa. On the other hand, they harbored suspicions of the representatives of the majority community who were interviewing them. This can be traced to the existence of an uneven power relationship between the Spanish society and the Moroccan minority group.

Intercultural Education, as I pointed out at the beginning of this article, aims to make what is invisible in human encounters visible. For human encounters to come about successfully there should be reciprocity between the parties concerned. This means that they should act upon the same premises for communication to take place.

When people from different ethnic backgrounds meet, it is sometimes the case that they do not understand the cultural codes of other communities or are not even aware that cultural codes can be dissimilar. This can include cultural codes that the majority perceives as self-evident. Notwithstanding, it seems that some young people have developed a third identity and are therefore already sentient

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of the various codes used in different situations. This means that meta-knowledge of a third identity could be applied in educational contexts in order to bridge different cultural, social, and linguistic gaps. Where such knowledge is not present, it proves paramount that teachers endeavor to make the invisible

visible. To achieve this goal, educators can make salient the cultural and social contexts and political hierarchies with which they themselves are familiar and raise awareness of the doxa embedded in the discourse of the actors involved in the communicative situation.

Notes

¹ Original work in English.

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