

## **Reflections on the Concept of Interculturality in the Current Educational Debate in Argentina**

### **Abstract**

In this paper we analyze the relevance of intercultural education within contemporary debate. First, we will review the Argentinean legislation. Then, we will discuss the core characteristics of the educational system, in order to study the historical incorporation of indigenous people in schools. Later, we will explore the actual legislation about intercultural education emphasizing their potentialities as well as their limitations. Finally, we will present the mainly discussions in the field of Anthropology and Education.

**Key words:** Indigenous peoples, Intercultural education, Educational legislation, Anthropology, Education.

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### **Introduction**

Argentina is a country characterized by both the vast diversity of its population and by great inequalities in terms of their quality of life. The country has a large aboriginal

population comprised of more than twenty indigenous nations and has attracted countless immigrants, with waves coming in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century from Europe, Asia and neighboring countries. The country's current legislation establishes that the nation is multi-ethnic and multilingual, comprised of the descendants of the Spanish settlers, migrants and indigenous people. Yet a detailed analysis reveals that the country's identity policies enable and establish rights within the framework of a country model that hegemonically categorizes and designates subjects. Since the formation of the nation state, indigenous people have been the target of diverse policies which have both rendered them invisible and highlighted their particularities. In this regard, ethnic identifications alternate between either emphasizing differences or denying them altogether, since diversity would appear to contradict the standardized notions of identity in terms of nationality and citizenship. For the classic nation-state, cultural diversity constitutes a problem (Dietz, 2012), and thus the insistence on ethnic homogeneity has contributed to the modern understanding of the notions of foreigners and borders (Zanfrini, 2007).

Recently the notion of interculturality has been configured as a political and social approach to a model that was historically based on projects and concepts such as *acculturation* and/or *assimilation*. Interculturality has thus become a key concept in the discussions and interventions of specialists and administrators of the educational, health, legal and territorial policies for indigenous populations across Argentina. It is the conceptual foundations for proposing measures that are not necessarily reflexive with respect to *otherness*.

In this article, we start by inquiring into the frequent use of the category 'interculturality' in public policies, especially in education, with an eye to specifically examining the conceptual references at work behind this notion. This question will be addressed as part of my research experiences within the Anthropology and Education

Program (Institute of Anthropological Sciences, School of Philosophy and Literature, Universidad de Buenos Aires). Since this research focus considers the relations of indigenous populations with other groups and with the State, one particular aspect to consider will be the ties these populations established with the school system. However, as we hope to show further on, the concept of interculturality should not be understood as limited to ties such as these. On the other hand, the article analyzes some of the most important legislation and policy documents and overviews both local and regional journals on anthropology and education published since the year 2000.

This paper is based on a search, selection, systematization and analysis of scholarly articles and laws focused on multiculturalism in education in Argentina. For the study, eleven local journals that deal with anthropology and education from the year 2000 until December 2013 were considered. The selection was limited to those with an available online version in order to ensure access and dissemination. Among the local journals, we considered it important to include publications from different provinces, including Córdoba, Buenos Aires, Jujuy, Salta and Misiones. The journals are *Ava*; *Publicar*; *Revista Intersecciones*; *Cuadernos (SEANSO)*; *Cuadernos (Jujuy)*; *Revista Andes*; *Claroscuro*; *Historia de la educación – anuario*; *Runa*; *Papeles de trabajo*; and *Revista del Museo de Antropología de Córdoba*.

The aim is to see how the concept of interculturality is understood in both legal texts and scholarly publications, and determine how many texts address the topic.

What motivated the thoughts embodied in this article, and the intersection of these two fields (public policy in general, but especially education) and academic debates, are the challenges and demands of various social movements, especially indigenous peoples for a right to education expressed in terms of interculturality, even in the fundamental laws of the country (National Constitution, for example). That is why it is essential to decipher the

meaning and scope of the concept, which is used within the policies that are supposed to vehicles that right, to know how much was discussed and analyzed in the scientific local field.

In summary, the objectives of this article are to present approaches to interculturality in public policies in general. Later, the focus will turn to the educational system, with a brief overview of the way socioethnic diversity was dealt with historically before turning to the uses of interculturality in recent public educational policies. Finally, the notion of interculturality in the field of anthropology and education will be discussed conceptually.

The uniqueness of the proposal that is reflected in this text is the lack of antecedents in the local scope of systematization regarding this subject.

### **Interculturality in Public Policies**

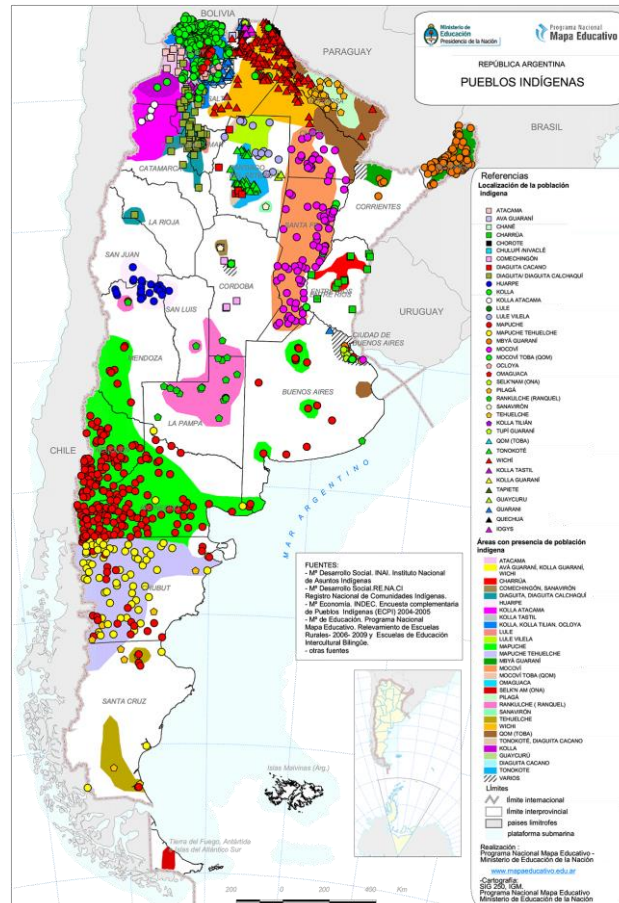
Like other countries in Latin America, Argentina is characterized by enormous socioethnic diversity. Within this diversity, there are more than twenty indigenous groups: *Atacama, Ava Guaraní, Chané, Charrúa, Chorote, Chulupi/Nivaclé, Comechingón, Diaguita, Diaguita Cacano, Diaguita Calchaquí, Guaycuru, Guaraní, Quechua, Huarpe, Kolla, Kolla Atacama, Kolla Guaraní, Kolla Tastil, Tilián, Lule, Lule Vilela, Mapuche, Mapuche Tehuelche, Mbyá Guaraní, Mocoví, Mocoví Toba, Ocloya, Omaguaca, Selk'nam/Ona, Pilagá, Ranquel/Rankulche, Sanavirón, Tapiete, Tehuelche, Qom/Toba, Tonokoté, Tupí Huarani and Wichí.*<sup>1</sup> Statistically, according to the last national census (Argentine Institute of Statistics and Censuses, 2010), of the country's forty million inhabitants, 2.4 percent state that they are indigenous or descendants of a native group.<sup>2</sup> In linguistic terms, in addition to Spanish and the languages of immigrants, fourteen indigenous languages are spoken with varying degrees of bilingualism. In some cases, the indigenous language is the first language children learn at home, while in other contexts these languages are gradually falling into disuse. It appears

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<sup>1</sup> Information taken from the educational map of the National Ministry of Education:  
[http://www.mapaeducativo.edu.ar/pueblos\\_indigenas/](http://www.mapaeducativo.edu.ar/pueblos_indigenas/)

<sup>2</sup> In Argentina, the census criterion for identifying indigenous peoples is self-acknowledgment and/or ancestry.

evident that the notion of *indigenous people*, as historically acknowledged by the state, misleadingly suggests linguistic and cultural homogenization of a broadly diverse population (Bartolomé, 2010).



Map 1: Indigenous groups of Argentina. Information taken from the educational map of the National Ministry of Education (08/10/2015) [http://www.mapaeducativo.edu.ar/images/file/pueblos-indigenas\\_mapa\\_def.gif](http://www.mapaeducativo.edu.ar/images/file/pueblos-indigenas_mapa_def.gif)

As a result of political shifts over the past three decades—including the restoration of democracy and new paradigms on cultural plurality—a series of policies for recognizing diversity have begun to be developed. Even so, unlike countries such as Mexico, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia where the discourse of interculturality has a history dating back decades, Argentina was late to apply it to laws and public policy guidelines. Only recently have

intercultural proposals become frequent. Such initiatives are generally within the areas of education and healthcare and, more recently though somewhat haphazardly, in the legal sphere.

The presence of an intercultural discourse becomes explicit when an attempt is made to acknowledge the particularities of a specific population. In the case of education, which is the topic of the following section, interculturality is generally associated with policies for indigenous people; in the case of healthcare, it sometimes also includes immigrants. In both cases, a distance is established with a Spanish-speaking *national identity* associated with hegemonic cultural standards and Western, Hippocratic healthcare practices. Other cases of ethnic-national collectives are generally understood only in terms of *communities*, such as the German or Polish community. It is important to note that in this case, interculturality never appears in public policies targeting the entire population i.e. a transformation of the greater social community. In other words, though the policies based on interculturality currently do not form part of positive discrimination policies, they do share similar objectives by fostering the incorporation of these *other* populations to the hegemonic state systems of education, healthcare, etc. In summary, there is no national declaration on interculturality that would allow any citizen to solicit inclusion within intercultural policies; this option is only available to those already identified as potential beneficiaries of these policies, fundamentally indigenous people.

The incorporation of intercultural aspects to the judicial sphere is also complex. There is no clear institutional definition on which cases require consulting or investigations that take into account the intercultural aspects of the plaintiffs or defendants. The assessment of this aspect is entrusted to the judge(s) assigned to a case. When interculturality is considered, it generally means that an indigenous person is involved, often as the defendant accused of a crime. Because no specific criterion has been established, a wide range of legal cases have

resorted to consultants in order to understand the complexity of conflict situations. These investigators and/or specialists aid in understanding the role which the cultural perceptions of the subjects play in such conflicts.

Educational planning for ethnic minorities has had different features during different points in history. In general terms, there are two trends: monolingual school models where linguistic-cultural particulars are ignored and excluded as part of hegemonic standards that target assimilation (homogenizing policies) and bilingual school models included in neoliberal compensation programs where socio-educational inequalities are covered up (focalized policies). Although these policies have at times overlapped and coexisted during different points in time, the first is prototypical of the formation of the nation-state (19th and 20th century) and the second corresponds to current-day policy (Hecht 2014). Actually, Intercultural Bilingual Education must also be understood in the framework of the legislative reforms that took place after democracy was restored in Argentina in 1983. As part of these reforms, indigenous peoples were granted differential rights and the government's discourse changed. In the new discourse, the state reduced its historically ethnocentric view to make way for ethnic plurality and respect for multiple identities. However, the existing laws served more as a declaration of principles of 'what should be' than as an operational basis for logical interventions (Falaschi, 1998). In other words, there is a visible lack of political will to pass laws that acknowledge indigenous rights, increasing the gap between discourse and practice. In addition, it is important to note that neoliberal policies do not lead to a transformation of the relations stemming from a classification of otherness of indigenous groups. Instead, paradoxically, they tend to consolidate inequalities beneath the shield of a discourse that tolerates differences (Petz 2006).

### **The Purposes of Intercultural Education**

At schools, diversity is generally associated with the identification of certain subjects as members of an indigenous or migrant group. Over time, the hegemonic power as represented by the state constructed a relationship with these communities, identifying its members as representative of the country's diverse population. In Argentina, the role of the school as an institution involved forming communities and stories about national identities. It thus contributed to the grounding of canonical ideas on the classification of different communities within the population (Novaro, 2012; Puiggrós, 2006a y 2006b). These identity configurations are seen in a unique way in school programs and each merits a specific analysis. However, this article will focus specifically on programs and policies targeting indigenous or native populations. Since interculturality appears to have emerged as part of a necessary—though continuously revised—response to the traditional homogenizing models fostered by state programs, this section provides a brief historic overview of programs of this kind in Argentine schools.

From a macro perspective, the educational policies that the Argentine state designed for groups considered *ethnic minorities* have varied significantly over history. There are two main trends: monolingual school models where cultural-linguistic differences are excluded or ignored through hegemonic guidelines (homogenizing policies) and bilingual school models, though these are included in positive discrimination programs that have at times served the purposes of neoliberal policies and covered up socio-educational inequalities (focalized policies) (Hecht, 2007 y 2013).

With regards to the former trends, the goal of Argentine schooling in the mid-nineteenth century was the homogenization of the urban and peri-urban population. This does not mean that state models were absent in rural areas, but that rural differences were rarely taken into account in such models (Puiggrós, 2006a). For students, homogeneity mainly



involved the *integration* of the hegemonic knowledge of language, history and geography. It is important to consider that the children who went to school at this time were those whose families could afford for them to go to school—not because of the expenses associated with schooling (public schools were free) but because of the lost income resulting from a son or daughter's delayed entry to the job market. The small percentage of the indigenous population that attended school during this period did not question the hegemonic curricular; on the contrary, their incorporation to schools suggested their *integration* to a Europeanized and urban model.

On the other hand, the more recent bilingual school models were part of focalized policies that often served to cover up socio-educational inequalities due to the particular way they exploited diversity (Neufeld y Thisted, 1999). In short, as noted in earlier articles (Borton, Enriz, García Palacios y Hecht 2010 y Hecht 2007 y 2013), both of these educational models appear to confront a false dilemma between assimilation/inclusion and segregation/exclusion (Borton Enriz, García Palacios y Hecht, 2010). In other words, there is a misleading dichotomy between an effort to include diversity that turns out to be—perhaps involuntarily—assimilative and a recovery of diversity which is rendered folkloristic and immutable, thus generating segregation.

Organizations outside the reach of the state and often associated with political, social and/or religious activism also intervened in the spaces for socialization and schooling of indigenous communities (Almirón, Artieda y Padawer, 2013). These experiences of bilingualism and literacy in the indigenous language (as well as the learning of Spanish) are important references in terms of the institutionalization of an intercultural educational approach, though they were private initiatives.

It is thus clear that indigenous populations were gradually incorporated to the school systems of different provinces, though such initiatives grew more intense after the turn of the

twentieth century. In the best cases, this occurred through different experiences at public schools, private schools, religious schools, etc. For example, in the case of the province of Chaco, indigenous children were incorporated to public schools at the end of the nineteenth century when indigenous colonies and settlements were established, as noted by Artieda y Rosso (2005). During this period, public schools were constructed for the children of indigenous workers on sugar plantations (Giordano, 2004). The goal of education for indigenous children at the time was focused on the discipline required in order for them to later join the workforce (Artieda y Hecht, 2012). This educational objective also applied to other disadvantaged social groups. In the case of the province of Misiones, indigenous children did not begin attending public schools until the nineteen-seventies. In different towns and cities, some indigenous families began sending their children to schools. At the end of the decade, private Catholic schools were built on the lands of indigenous settlements. Teachers from Paraguay were hired in the belief that they would speak the same language as the children and their families, thus generating closer ties. This gesture was in vain, since the teachers spoke a different dialect of Guaraní, thus making it impossible for indigenous children to be adequately incorporated to local schools.

More recently, in conjunction with the policies for ethnic recognition, the concept of interculturality has been more broadly incorporated to education. Bilingual Intercultural Education (EIB, its Spanish acronym) is one educational policy targeting these ethnic minorities, who are the focus not only because of their linguistic-cultural diversity but also because their living conditions are characterized by inequality and poverty.

The legislation on EIB in Argentina is based on Article 75, Section 17 of the Argentine constitution (amended in 1994) and a series of laws currently enforce it: Resolution No. 107 of the Federal Council of Culture and Education [CFCE] (1999); Resolution No. 549 of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Argentina (2004); the statement by

the National Program of Bilingual Intercultural Education of the National Department of Positive Discrimination Programs, Educational Equality and Quality Undersecretariat of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Argentina (2004); National Education Law No. 26206 (2006); statement for the Bilingual Intercultural Education Program within the National Educational System of the Federal Council of Education (2010) and Resolution No. 105 of the Federal Council of Education (2010).

Below a summary of the EIB experiences in the province of Chaco provides background on some of this legislation. EIB was initially implemented in the province after Provincial Law No. 3258 ‘On Indigenous Communities’ was passed in 1987. Since that year, the province of Chaco has been one of the most progressive in terms of its acknowledgment of indigenous rights in the school system. This is because the provincial law provides official recognition of local indigenous languages and establishes the possibility for public schools administered by native peoples. Misiones, however, took much longer to implement intercultural initiatives. It was not until the first decade of the twenty-first century that the province launched an intercultural border program, mainly with schools in Brazil. A few years later, the initiatives of bilingual education were expanded for the local indigenous populations through the hiring of bilingual teaching assistants who spoke Spanish-*Mbya* Guaraní at schools with *Mbya* Guaraní students.

One initial aspect to emphasize is that to a varying degree, the term interculturality is generally limited to indigenous affairs. The earliest legislation from the list above, Resolution No. 107 (CFCE, 1999: 107) states: ‘Interculturality recognizes the right of the aboriginal populations to recover, maintain and strengthen their identity and to meet and establish bonds with other peoples and cultures at the local, regional, national and international level.’ A notion of interculturality in which the protagonists are only the bearers of markers of otherness is assumed here, suggesting a relationship or bond with others who lack ethnic

markers. This way of viewing interculturality renders invisible the historic and political process of a certain group and establishes the universal sociocultural guidelines; the framework of a group bearing ethnic markers is thus lost, at the same time as its guidelines are constructed as both particular and specific to them (Briones, 1998).

When assessing the laws on interculturality listed above, it is important to note that National Educational Law No. 26206 (2006) makes no mention of interculturality outside of the section that deals with EIB. Specifically, this law defines EIB as one of eight educational programs (professional technical education, artistic education, special education, ongoing education of youth and adults, rural education, prison education, homeschooling and hospital education) covering the first three levels of the school systems (preschool, elementary school and high school). The division of education into these eight programs is aimed at overcoming a segregated vision of education based on positive discrimination in which specific policies targeted specific groups. However, the narrow scope of this policy raises new doubts on the scope of this transformation; for example, it does not contemplate the possibility of implementing an intercultural proposal in conjunction with any of the educational programs mentioned above. In this regard, we understand that this approach considers specific needs and potential ways of meeting these needs with the aim of guaranteeing equal access to education, in opposition to the positive discrimination inherent to the previous proposals. However by reducing the benefits of EIB to solely *indigenous people*, these proposals are not mainstreamed in practice and ultimately both migrant and non-indigenous students are excluded from them. In other words, this definition reserves EIB as a right exclusive to indigenous peoples, excluding both other groups considered different and the general population.

The recurring use of interculturality when discussing indigenous people in the context of Argentina is highly complex on many levels. First, it creates an isomorphism by which

indigenous areas are automatically considered rural zones, thus rendering invisible otherness in the urban sphere. Gordillo y Hirsch (2010) warn of the dynamic nature of all identity positioning, specifically focusing on the processes of ethnic displacement and emergence in Argentina. Thus an ethnic geography or map with constantly shifting borders is configured. Taking into account that there are groups of indigenous people in the majority of the country's urban centers, the authors insist that the vast geographical dispersion must be taken into account. Such consideration would help overcome a static vision that conceives of such populations 'as rigidly anchored to limited geographical regions' (Gordillo y Hirsch, 2010: 18). On the other hand, there are numerous communities or groups other than aboriginals who are defined in ethnic or national terms, like the majority of the Latin American migrant community. These individuals are not considered in this intercultural approach, and thus subtle forms of discrimination occur within the framework of a policy proposed as inclusive. Finally, the groups considered representative of the parameters of educational programs characterized as *common* or *normal* are left out of the intercultural approach and benefits offered by the EIB.

It is important to briefly examine this aspect and review the limits to the conceptualization of 'indigenous.' First, 'indigenous' is strongly associated with rural or community living. This is understood as a clearly defined environment in both social and territorial terms and is associated with isolation, ghetto or enclave. From this perspective, urban territorial groups are not conceived of as settlements in which indigenous issues can be considered. On the other hand, the difficulties of considering how independent variables overlap become evident. For example, with regards to immigrant or foreign populations, and speakers of indigenous languages or those identified with cultural repertoires associated with indigenous peoples, a marker of foreignness tends to prevail.

In this regard, the province of Buenos Aires offers a paradigmatic case. According to the last census, it is the province with the greatest ethnic and national diversity along with the largest indigenous population in the country, especially in its urban centers and suburbs. At the same time, one of the goals of Buenos Aires Provincial Education Law No. 13688 (2007) is to ‘Promote the value of interculturality in the education of all students, ensuring that the aboriginal peoples and migrant communities retain their language and cultural identity,’ (Article 16, Section 16). However, the educational program of the province has no EIB experiences comparable to those of Chaco or Misiones. The province of Buenos Aires reveals the limits that have traditionally existed when considering interculturality from an urban perspective.

In this regard, it is important to consider the Document for the Bilingual Intercultural Education Program within the National Educational System of the Federal Council of Education (2010), the result of joint efforts articulated in different seminars and meetings at the national and regional level, organized between 2008 and 2010. Here the debate on interculturality was proposed in broad terms (mainstream, for everyone, etc.) in spite of the fact that the program's activities targeted indigenous children exclusively. The limited scope of interculturality is striking considering that since the National Education Law was passed, indigenous agents have participated in defining policies, with the Autonomous Educational Council of Indigenous Peoples playing a leading role.

A quote from the document provides insight in this regard:

A pedagogical focus with an intercultural perspective proposes to reinforce the capacity for dialogue among different people and populations without requiring them to leave their differences aside. Similarly, it proposes to construct bridges and enhance communication to permit closer relations and the full expression of these differences,

be they cultural and/or linguistic. (...) The concept of interculturality appeared in Latin America over three decades ago in conjunction with the struggles and claims of the indigenous peoples of the regions. These groups were demanding and continue to demand not only legal recognition but also the implementation of their rights (territorial, cultural and educational rights, among others) in order for them to be able to participate actively in national life. Thus interculturality, though proposed as a way to initiate democratic dialogue among diverse cultures, must also address the situations of inequality in which this dialogue is established. As noted in the Balance and Perspective of Bilingual Intercultural Education in Argentina document (1999: 66-67) ‘...It is very difficult to speak of interculturality in a situation of oppression in which a social sector is denigrated. In order to achieve interculturality, we have to ensure equal conditions for all.’ (Document for the Bilingual Intercultural Education Program within the National Educational System of the Federal Council of Education, 2010: 9)

However, as mentioned earlier, in the best cases in Argentina, interculturality in education seems to translate into a specific content or work strategy in the classroom. It is usually limited to such applications, which generally remain at the rhetorical level. Thus the concept's potential for critiquing and challenging the status quo has not been exploited. In other words, interculturality should entail the construction of an intercultural society where linguistic-cultural diversity is respected and valued. As a concept, it must also constantly challenge the social order in order not to omit the relations of inequality and subalternity that surround the subjects who bear ethnic markers.

In summary, there is no Argentine declaration on interculturality that would allow any citizen to solicit inclusion within intercultural policies; this option is only available to those already identified as potential beneficiaries of these policies, fundamentally indigenous

people. The analysis of the definition of EIB clearly reveals that the mere existence of an EIB policy does not imply that all of Argentine society benefits from the policy. Instead, the policy focuses on certain sectors of the country, at the points where identities are understood by the state in terms of otherness. The overview of the program shows that this is a debate at the state-level that deeply involves schools and the conception of education as a national system. The new legislation and the position that the EIB occupies at different levels of the state administration have not sufficed to achieve more sweeping changes in approaching interculturality through the educational experience. A *national society* based on a monocultural notion of the state does not benefit from this diversity or even incorporate it to its own messages. On the contrary, it develops and promotes actions so that these *others* meet the conditions necessary to join the dialogue and exchange.

### **Interculturality in Scholar**

My initial goal in this article was to evaluate the use of the notion of interculturality in public policy design and more specifically, in the proposals of educational policies. In this section, the aim is to discover the theoretical sources of this notion and how the concept appears in academic debate.

In the first place, it is useful to note a certain similarity between intercultural educational policies and the approach to interculturality in academia. In both settings, the notion has been gradually defined as a topic of research and theoretical reflection. In terms of the visibility of these discussions, despite what we might posit if we limited ourselves to the reach of this concept in the specific policies proposed, interculturality appears as only a marginal topic in scholarly anthropological research, with only a handful of works available to cite. On the other hand, it is a topic that frequently appears at round tables and talks at



anthropology conferences, with speakers often appropriating the discourses on interculturality from other fields such as education.

The materials available reveal that interculturality is again a concept associated with the indigenous question, one that appears when discussing education, healthcare and law. In studies associated with these communities, interculturality is a frequent category for reflecting on educational processes, land ownership and notions of healthcare and illness. This extremely limited use of interculturality merits note. Instead of appropriating interculturality as a general concept, in the approaches reviewed here, the notion is brought to bear in critical approaches towards discriminatory practices of certain communities, or when discussing the specific needs of certain populations but never of the general population. As we will see in the section on interculturality and law, there is a similar approach to the notion in legal spheres.

In this study, eleven local journals that deal with anthropology and education from the year 2000 until December 2013 were considered. A total of 597 articles were published in these eleven journals during the period analyzed. Thirty of them addressed themes associated with migrants or indigenous people, eleven dealt with questions related to childhood and ethnicity, and five were on intercultural education.

The relatively low quantity of articles on this topic in journals published in Argentina again raises the question of the particular way interculturality is viewed within academic circles. This is especially striking given the number of laws that incorporate the concept, ensuring access to constitutional rights for a great number of subjects. Paradoxically, in the scholarly articles the term interculturality is used merely when alluding to the presence of indigenous population or a geographical region inhabited by aboriginals, without questioning or seeking to define the concept in any way. In other words, certain scholarly uses of the term are similar to the way it is used in legal texts. The ties between the scholarly and legislative use of the term reveal how interculturality is thought of as the core of a general policy.

However, it is a policy that applies exclusively to a specific type of subject, seeking to expand only the rights of certain communities.

The debates on interculturality became very relevant in the framework of education and consequently, there was an *educationalization* of the intercultural discourse (Dietz, 2012). This can partly be attributed to a lack of precision with regards to the concept, which was neither discussed nor reworked but instead applied acritically from a romantic conceptualization of dialogue and exchange. Here power relations and inequality are overlooked in pursuit of the idea of an encounter. In keeping with the argument of Dietz (2012) for Mexico, in Argentina the presence of minority children (ethnic, cultural or religious minorities, etc.) with their particularities at schools has opened the door to multiculturalism at schools and to a theoretical debate on interculturality. One example of this is that interculturality is often used as a synonym for biculturality, which represents a different model for interpreting society in theoretical terms. Biculturality is a model that homogenizes two groups in order to clearly differentiate them from one another. Thus the bias in biculturality implies two cultural referents, both of which are essentialized or clearly defined in terms of their differences. In other words, it overlooks the historic and conflictive nature of ethnic identities in the day-to-day work at schools.

The term interculturality brings to bear a theoretical perspective that acknowledges the importance of taking into account the particularities which define the relations—be they harmonious or conflictive—between groups or communities in each regional context. It allows scholars to analyze how power relations and inequalities are fundamental when considering the way in which relations among groups are constructed. However, in the works analyzed for this study, interculturality as a theoretical category appears as merely a synonym of otherness, a concept referring to the presence of *others* instead of one which allows the relations between groups to be considered. This becomes clear on the few occasions in which

theoretical discussions on interculturality take variables of class, inequality and power into consideration. On the other hand, in the sources analyzed we find depoliticized references to the concept of culture. This limits the potential of this concept while distancing it from important variables like the ones mentioned above. Such conceptions become visible when the reference to social inequality is excluded as part of the false assumption that inequality cannot be eliminated but that cultural differences can be combined in a harmonious way (Alonso y Díaz, 2004).

The limited use of the concept of interculturality in the pieces analyzed within the field of research of education create the false idea that any recognition in and of itself is positive. One example of this is when interculturality is used as a tool for mediation. However, I am interested in emphasizing another meaning associated with the concept of interculturality, that which attempts to promote the construction of knowledge. By doing so, it aims to provide visibility for elements that have been historically overlooked in educational processes. Such processes reveal the diverse possibilities of imagination, perception, cognition and action of different social groups, and the unequal way in which these are represented in school narratives and practices (Diez, Hecht, Novaro y Padawer, 2011; García Castaño, Pulido Moyano, y Montes del Castillo, 1999; Tadeu da Silva, 2008; Walsh, 2009).

Without a doubt, anthropology has much to contribute to the debate in this regard. Like Dietz (2012), we believe it is necessary to compare and contrast the theoretical dimensions and practices of the prescriptive and descriptive actions of the intercultural discourse, separating those instances in which interculturality is considered an intervention requiring discussion of its conceptual reach. In relation to this last idea, that of conceptual reflections, the challenge that remains is to get to know others without rendering them folkloristic or exotic, without reducing or reifying them. Instead, the aim would be to focus on their contacts, interaction, disputes, historic processes and complex power relations.

## Conclusions

In summary, the historic approach to socioethnic diversity in the field of education has been highly complex and nuanced depending on whether the population in question is indigenous or migrant; whether the geographical range is national or provincial; and even among different provincial jurisdictions. The responses to this diversity range from homogenization to assimilation and policies directed exclusively at the indigenous, where compensation/segregation and integration/assimilation seem to be the key concepts chosen by educational institutions to forge connections with those whom they consider as others.

The category of interculturality is polysemic and trending; it often figures on the agendas of public policy makers and in the conceptual debates of scholars of different disciplines. The goal of this article was to review the use of this term in both legal documents and in the theoretical texts of the field of anthropology and education in Argentina. In closing, we would like to emphasize some of the most important aspects of interculturality as it is presented in theoretical discussion and implemented in practice.

First, it is interesting to note that although our analysis was limited to education, almost no reference to the term is found outside this field i.e. in economic, political or religious studies. Thus fades the potential of interculturality as a concept which could contribute to a discussion on citizenship and indigenous rights in the framework of interethnic relations at the core of the state. In other words, the pending debate on how nation-states catalogued as monocultural can be constructed within territories recognized as multicultural or multinational is again relegated.

The limited and restricted use of interculturality is also emphasized, as the concept is understood as an indigenous issue or at most, one that also takes migrants into account. Thus

the term is conceived of as basically a synonym of difference—understood in Eurocentric terms and thus attributed to the other—and not as mainstream or as corresponding to all society and research topics. As often occurs in other problematic fields like gender relations, where gender is often synonymous with “women,” interculturality is frequently limited to interactions with aboriginals and/or migrants. At the same time, however, when interculturality and difference are considered synonym, other corollaries appear such as the isomorphism between indigenous populations and the countryside, or the way in which numerous collectives or groups defined in ethnic and/or national terms are rendered invisible through the category of ‘indigenous.’

Finally, we would like to close by reiterating the need to extend the uses of the concept, considering the possible limitations and acritical applications of the term. It is also necessary to begin debating its field of application, expanding it to diverse social dimensions. Such discussion must begin not only in scholarly settings but also and most importantly, at the governmental level as well as among the communities who fight to have their rights acknowledged by appealing to interculturality.

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