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***Educación intercultural en la familia, un medio para  
disminuir la discriminación inter-étnica en Gabón***  
***Intercultural education in the family, a means to reduce  
inter-ethnic discrimination in Gabon***

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**Resumen:** El objetivo de este trabajo es proponer el estudio de la educación intercultural en la familia como orientación educativa para disminuir la discriminación étnica hacia los pigmeos en Gabón. Los pigmeos son pobladores de la selva, hombres de metro y medio que siempre han vivido en contacto con la madre naturaleza y sufren de discriminación por parte de otros grupos étnicos. En el proceso educativo orientado el educador debe tener un papel activo que consiste en utilizar los métodos de la formación de la conciencia moral para lograr un cambio de actitud hacia los pigmeos.

**Palabras clave:** Educación intercultural; Discriminación inter-étnica; Competencia intercultural; Pigmeo

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to propose the study of intercultural education in the family as an educational guide to reduce ethnic discrimination towards the Pygmies in Gabon. The Pygmies are people of the forest, small men who have always lived in contact with Mother Nature and suffer discrimination from other ethnic groups. In the educative process the educator must have an active role and use the methods of the education of the moral conscience to achieve a change of attitude towards the pygmies.

**Keywords:** Intercultural education; Inter-ethnic discrimination; Intercultural competence; Pygmy

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## **Introduction**

Many human groups today are victims of ethnic-racial discrimination in the world. Ethnic or racial discrimination is any differential, exclusive or restrictive treatment based on ethnic or cultural origin (habits, customs, clothing, symbols, life forms, sense of belonging, language and beliefs of a particular social group) such as skin color, features, stature, hair color, etc. which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms of people discriminated against in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. (Sbandi, 1980)

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In Gabon, ethnic discrimination is an ancestral social phenomenon that has triggered xenophobic, prejudiced and disqualifying behaviors of the "other" (foreign, alien, different persons). However, ensuring the recognition of the others is essential for the consolidation of identities in any authentic model of democracy.

Intercultural education is an educational proposal that seeks to work the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that allow the members of a society to interact, communicate and coexist (intercultural competence), in a way that establishes relationships of equal opportunities, exercise of rights, fulfillment of duties and responsibilities, and full participation in the social set avoiding situations of exclusion and discrimination. (Duberman, 1990)

Americans have preferentially used the term "multi-ethnic education," while in Europe the term "intercultural education" has been consolidated. The principles on which this intercultural educational approach is formulated and developed can be synthesized in the promotion and respect for all coexisting cultures and condemn the political measures designed to assimilate immigrants and cultural minorities to the majority culture. (Moskochochov, 1974)

Interculturality is not limited to describing a particular situation, it is also to define an approach, procedure, dynamic process of a social nature in which the participants are positively driven to be aware of their interdependence and is also a philosophy, politics and thought that systematizes such an approach. (Deutsh, 1954)

This paper proposes intercultural education in the family as a means to reduce ethnic discrimination towards the Pygmies in Gabon. Educators as facilitators can use the methods of forming moral conscience to change attitudes in people.

## **Development**

### **Towards intercultural education**

Gabon, whose capital is Libreville, is a multicultural country located on the coast of central Africa, and is bordered by Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, the Republic of Congo and the Gulf of Guinea. It has an area of 267 667 km<sup>2</sup>, its population is 1.5 million inhabitants. In Gabon there are about 43 ethnic groups, including Fang, Kota-kele, Mbede-Teke, Pygmies, Myene, Nzabi-Duma, Okande-Tsogho, Shira-Punu. Currently in Gabon there is an ethnic discrimination towards the pygmy group because of its culture, physical characteristics and Okomo religion. (cited by Eyeang, 1997)

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The pygmy tribe is nomadic with a long cultural tradition dedicated to fishing and hunting, fruit picking and their love of music. Some of the most studied Pygmy tribes on the African continent are the Mbutis, Akas, Bakas, Yakas, Bagyelis, Bingas, Ephes and Twas. According to the International Working Group on Indigenous Issues in Africa (Eyeang, 2011), about 20,000 Pygmies live in Gabon. As a result of ethnic discrimination, they have no access to health and education.

The remaining ethnic groups regard them as an uncultured and subhuman people (Eyeang, 2011). In order to face this discriminatory reality, intercultural education in the family is the way to reform the social practice that can respond and contribute to solve the problem. In the process of intercultural education, the educational task must first be oriented toward the family because it constitutes the first socializing agent of the human being.

As a socializing agent, the family can contribute to the process of intercultural education in Gabon, in the sense that the transmission of moral values, norms and customs through it can allow the person to integrate favorably into society. The family is attributed the most important educational function because of the possibilities of influence that it exerts from very early ages when the subject is more ductile in its reception. (Valdivia, 1988)

The family is assigned different functions: sexual, procreative, socializing and, finally, economic. In this regard Munné (cited by Vasallo, 2005) considers that the first two can be united and that can be added other functions that relate it to other institutions such as: religious, political and recreational; in addition, it shares the criterion that the most important one is the one of socialization.

In view of the above, the family can be directed towards an intercultural education to reduce the discrimination of the pygmy group in Gabon. The family, considered as the first school of man has an essential role in the process of socialization of the person. (Valdivia, 1988)

But it is important to point out that it is not the only socializing agent, but the most important one, since it is the one that serves as reference to the person, gives an important continuity in that action, and constitutes the referent with greater affective potential in the life of the boy. Other socializing agents such as the school, the informal groups, the community, contribute to the education of the person. (Vasallo, 2005)

In the process of intercultural education in the family sphere in Gabon, the example can be used as an educational method to achieve a formation of moral conscience in the different members of the family. The method of the example is to objectively appreciate the qualities desired to form in the

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person as, for example respect for others, modesty, simplicity, discipline, courtesy. These qualities are manifested in everyday life in relationships within the family and in society.

Educators as active members in the educational process can serve as a point of reference by giving examples of good behavior, teaching and approaching people. In this sense, families can continuously turn their eyes towards educators and value their actions. The example of the educator, therefore, may affect not only the family, but progressively throughout the community. In this educational process educators can serve as a moral and behavioral model.

Family members can be in direct contact with the educator in the educational process, at the same time they can value their attitudes and criteria, imitating many personality traits. Then, the educational work can transcend the framework of the family and, therefore, orientate itself towards the whole society (communities, cultural institutions, and mass organizations). The active role of the family is crucial in the formation of moral values. (Vasallo, 2005)

As an aid to the student in his or her integral development as a member of society, the role of the educator or pedagogue is not limited to the transmission of knowledge, but involves the participation of the individual to build their personal knowledge integrated with the reality of their environment. The educator as facilitator in the process of socialization transmits knowledge with a view to contribute to the psychosocial well-being of the learner.

In the process of transmitting knowledge in the family environment in Gabon, the educator can use the method of dialogue, which, as an educational method, can also contribute to the attainment of a change of attitude and discriminatory behavior within the family.

Dialogue or ethical conversation is an educational method that can, in the same way, be used at different levels or social groups. It can be appreciated as a teaching-learning technique that focuses on reflective and critical dialogue, which is based on the informal experience of those involved: educator-student; student-student; educator-student-social group, to constitute an integral dialogue, sustained in the argumentation and the reflection. (Labarrere, 1988)

This method consists of a rapprochement between the educator and the students with the aim of analyzing attitudes, behaviors of the community or of another community, or personal or other people's behavior. The use of dialogue requires, first, an adequate selection of the subject, in this case ethnic discrimination, which will then be analyzed and, subsequently, the development of an interview guide.

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It should also take into account the place where it will be applied, the duration of the activity and the means to support it: recordings, photographs, video tape and others. Educators can usually verbally explain to learners what is right and what is wrong. During the dialogue, specific behaviors can be analyzed. The process is like a slow motion, producing an attitude, a behavior, to study it with greater precision and critical analysis.

In the same sense of education of the moral conscience in the familiar bosom in Gabon one can also resort to persuasion as an educational method. It is necessary to specify that it must be geared towards intercultural education.

Persuasion, in essence, is a method of forming a moral conscience designed to change the attitude or behavior of the person or group towards some ideas, objects or person(s). It is mainly used the use of the word to communicate information, feelings, or reasoning, or a combination of these aspects. It is the process of guiding towards the adoption of an idea, attitude, or action through rational meanings, and it is a problem solving strategy that relies on "requests" rather than "coercion."

Persuasion as a method is important in the process of formation of the moral conscience of the masses, it is achieved with it the conviction from the practice of daily life. In the application of this method the conviction has an extraordinary force. Only with the help of persuasion does the affirmation of convictions operate as a system of ideas and opinions that are transformed into orientations and values.

As a method of the formation of the moral conscience, persuasion emanates from the properties of consciousness and the dialectical nature of thought. The application of this method in groups requires pedagogical knowledge and a deep mastery of the psychological laws that allow the study of personalities.

## **Conclusions**

At present the phenomenon of ethnic discrimination is perceived in the society of Gabon. In order to try to eradicate this problem, intercultural education should first be directed to the family as the nucleus of society. Orienting intercultural education towards the family in Gabon can lead to a critical analysis of the people towards the need to go beyond the practical coexistence of different cultures, fundamentally seeking the communicative relations of equality, constructive dialogue, participation, and coexistence, autonomy and reciprocity.

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In this way, educating the family from an intercultural perspective means preparing people to live in a society where cultural diversity is not only legitimate but appreciated as a value. Educating for a pluralism and, therefore, for interculturality, means educating in respect for all identities, contributing to the formation of citizens able to integrate socially and culturally without losing their own identity. For this reason, the intercultural approach should contain a political dimension in Gabon and educate in democratic citizenship.

Intercultural education not only respects the fact of cultural differences but also values them as positive, since difference is a principle of complementarity and dialogue is the means for understanding the values, attitudes and habits of others.

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