
COMMENT TO II INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR OF CRITICAL EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The II International Seminar of Critical Education for Development Cooperation, organised by IEPALA², with support from AECID (the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation) and AACID (the Andalusian Agency for International Development Cooperation), was held in Madrid from 1 to 3 March 2012.

The main aims of this second edition (the first was held in 2010 on 23 and 24 March), in terms of the analysis/debate on the Realities of the Current Globalized World and the Crisis, were the following:

- To study the need to rethink research into the “hows”, “whys” and “wherefores”, in other words the nature, purpose and aims of content, methodologies, applied practices, techniques being used, results, training and action (in transformation?) currently being carried out in our respective institutions, organisations and study centres and by other actors and agencies involved in the so-called Development (for) Cooperation in Latin American, Asian and African countries, particularly those with large integrated populations in their respective societies.

- To hold talks, if necessary, in order to redefine the relevant role of: the so-called Organised Civil Society, the NGOs for Development and other purposes, Academies and Universities, Study and Training Centres with ad hoc names, Social Organisations... the role of Education for Development and Social Policy must be to comply with the aspirations of Sovereign States from Latin America, Africa and Asia. Furthermore, the role that must be fulfilled by the societies from the “North” in terms of (inside or outside? Against?) Political Power and, if agreed, in terms of (against?) Economic Power and its structures, the strength of membership and appropriation of the Broad Market.

The II International Seminar of Critical Education for Development Cooperation gave rise to diverse and multiple reflections, debates and analyses, and brought together representatives from networks, organisations and social movements from four continents; people connected to and interested in cooperation and education for development – students and teachers of postgraduate courses, of formal and non-formal education, socio-cultural advocates, technicians from NGOs, cooperation experts, etc.

Within this framework, there were speakers, round-table participants and assistants,

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² IEPALA – Institute of Political Studies for Latin America, Asia and Africa

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panels and groups that worked over the three intensive to days to express their opinions, concerns and proposals, in the process leaving a great deal of material for reflection and action.

The speakers included the economist and researcher, Rémy Herrer, from CNRS (the National Centre for Scientific Research, Paris); Óscar Jara, one of the leading figures in methodology and the praxis of Systematised Experiences and educator and facilitator of social practices with over 30 years' experience, from CEAAL (the Council of Adult Education in Latin America); Boaventura de Sousa Santos, professor of sociology and the head of the Centre of Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, promoter and activist in the World Social Forum; and many, many more... with over 200 active participants.

Rémy Herrera stated how, “we need to start looking for radical solutions in a time of post-capitalism” and, in the current climate, with many countries sharing common economic and social difficulties, it is time to “unite in our common struggles, those in the North and those in the South, to enable us to survive this crumbling system”. The unity of solidarity among countries must be the starting point for “development cooperation”, with the consolidation of this unity arising “by means of the establishment of democratic spaces in which real problems can be openly and freely discussed.”

Right up to the present day, “many atrocities have been committed in the name of democracy”, circumstances that are intangible because they do not allow people to participate, discuss and have a bearing on relevant political decisions; one example being the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon.

Rémy Herrera's words gave rise to an in-depth debate involving Pablo de la Vega, from PIDHDD (the Inter-American Platform for Human Rights, Democracy and Development), “for a truly representative democracy we must challenge the hegemonic instruments of control belonging to established powers”; Antonio Tuján, from the IBON Foundation in the Philippines, “collective civil action is key to driving changes in solidarity, social transformation and democratic participation”; Diana Senghor from the PANOS Institute, West Africa, who stated how the cooperation agencies of Northern countries “have become new machines for the colonisation and control of the South.”

Óscar Jara called for the reinvention of organisations and the relations between these organisations and civil society to make us stronger, and also stressed the need to regain an associative spirit. In terms of this reinvention regarding training in cooperation, he stressed the importance of “moving from ITCs – Information, Technology and Communication – to TEPs – the Technology of Empowerment and Participation – and outlined how, “hope is a virtue, the problem is hoping without hope.”

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Boaventura de Sousa Santos placed emphasis on the need to, “decolonise social sciences, particularly the decolonisation of the *Western* and *colonialist* thought and vision of the world. European culture is presented as a universal theory when really there are many others throughout the world and many lives in many different places across the globe”, and added that, “after five centuries of teaching the world, Europe does not have to teach any longer; the worst thing is that its colonialist vision has made it lose the ability to learn”. Therefore, he stressed the need to create alternative modes of thought: “decolonise, decommmodify and democratise”, only possible if we unite in the anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggles, as without this unity cooperation may well be false.

Representatives from the four continents contributed with their vision of a potential “new cooperation”, and unanimously stressed that unity and people's struggle is the best alternative for setting up a kind of cooperation based on equality and social justice. Taufik Ben Abdallah, from Tunisia and ENDA Tiers Monde (ENDA Third World), highlighted how, “we need to build a new politically active generation that provides a new dynamic and strength for social struggles.” Ramón Bultran, from IMA (the International Mission for Migrants, Asia Pacific), emphasised how, “a few world elites are attempting to impede cooperation between peoples because this unity is not in their interests”, and outlined how cooperation must be based on “issues that affect people, not tactical issues for States and organisations.” From Latin America, Nelsy Lizarazo from ALER (the Latin American Association of Radiophonic Education) added that this struggle must be directed towards “the wealth concentrated in only a few hands.”

The II International Seminar of Critical Education for Development Cooperation left all the considerations, proposals, issues and perspectives of the diverse Work Groups, comprised of participants from Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe, open.

This seminar compiled an extensive list of points to tackle, issues to reflect upon and analyse, in addition to a large number of contributions and approaches to take on board whilst on a road that leads us to a world in which All Human Rights are for All Human Beings. All the networks in attendance committed to continue working... united.

We would like to thank –emotionally, ethically, technically and politically– all those people that attended and participated in the event in an attempt to “converge thinking and attitudes to change our horizon”.³

³ For further information and access to documents and talks please go to:
<http://www.iepala.es/>
<http://www.iepala.es/educacion-para-el-desarrollo/proyectos/seminario-internacional-de/>