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Culture, emotions and narratives in education for cultural diversity: A sociocultural approach

Nathalie Muller Mirza

University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

Developing a reflexive stance on personal emotions and experiences relating to *otherness* is one of the main goals of innovative pedagogical activities designed to combat racism. This novel *socio-constructivist* approach to cultural diversity in education seems an interesting alternative to *essentialist* approaches, as it involves the learner and uses reflexivity to foster change. However, little is yet known about the psychosocial effects of introducing emotions and personal experiences into the learning environment. In this paper, adopting a sociocultural theoretical framework, we describe two pedagogical settings in which students' emotions and personal experiences were addressed in a multicultural context. The results of our first study showed that, in some teacher-student interactions, students' verbalized emotions were articulated in a more generic discourse. Working with emotions can therefore lead to what we call a *secondarization* process, whereby personal experiences are related to collective and conceptualized knowledge. However, these pedagogical practices may also generate unexpected outcomes that hinder learning. The second study explored the structuring effect of (self-)narratives, viewed as psychological instruments. These findings are discussed with a view to informing the debate on the role of emotional aspects in education, and sociocultural research in psychology examining the complex interplay between individual and cultural dimensions in learning.

Keywords: emotions, cultural diversity, narrative, social interactions, sociocultural approach

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Corresponding author: nathalie.mullermirza@unil.ch

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Increasing migration and the resulting ethnic diversity of students have led to renewed interest in concepts and designs that address the multi-ethnic nature of classrooms (de Haan & Elbers, 2009). Cultural diversity is often perceived of in terms of challenges, as it may generate not only difficulties in learning, particularly for minority and migrant students, but also mismatches and conflicts among students or between students and teachers. However, there are different ways of explaining how and why cultural dimensions may affect learning and relationships in the classroom. Various definitions and approaches to the notion of *culture* are used, and provide different answers to these questions. Broadly speaking, two main conceptions of culture can be identified in the literature: the first one is a vision of culture that Matusov, Smith, Candela, & Lilu (2007) describe as *essentialist*, in which culture is seen as a pre-existing factor that frames relationships. It generally leads to the *problems* being interpreted as the result of a *cultural discontinuity*, between the cultural norms and knowledge represented by schools versus students. The second conception, which Matusov and colleagues dubbed as *constructivist (or socio-constructivist) and dialogic*, is built on the idea that cultures are constructed in social interactions, and differences are constitutive of any dialogue (Wegerif, 2011). It meets the main ideas of a sociocultural perspective in psychology that views human development as the result of interactions between people and their social environment, and the processes of making sense (Bruner, 1991; Hatano & Wertsch, 2001; Moro & Muller Mirza, 2014; Vygotsky, 1986; Zittoun, 2006, 2016).

Drawing on a sociocultural perspective that focuses on the interdependence between culture and mind, and between personal subjectivity and collective meanings, we examined data gathered in two multi-ethnic contexts. The analysis of the first corpus – collected in education for cultural diversity lessons designed to enhance students' ability to reflect on their own experiences, emotions and opinions, and reduce racism – revealed how, in specific situations, students' personal experiences and emotions were discussed in teacher-students conversations and gradually articulated in collective meanings. We then describe an intervention implemented in a multi-ethnic classroom in a vocational school that was intended to reduce intercultural conflicts. We discuss the results of an analysis of students' productions and highlight the possible role of narrative construction in identity development.

Tackling Cultural Diversity in Schools. From an Essentialist Conception to a Sociocultural and Narrative Conception of Culture

Diversity as the culture of the other.

Diversity is nothing new in education. As recalled by Hjörne and Säljö (2014), even in the highly selective scribal schools of Mesopotamia some 5000 years ago, there were some *mismatches* between the educators' intentions and the students' adaptation: "The identity of being a pupil implies subordination to specific rules and institutional norms that differ from those that apply to being

a child" (p. 1). Today, the expansion of schooling and global scale of large migratory movements make diversity a central feature of educational settings in many countries. Nevertheless, responses to the question of how to tackle diversity vary from one context to another, according to the political history, economic background and *philosophical* spirit that determine how diversity is defined in a specific environment.

Other dimensions have been highlighted by academics. Refuting the prevailing notion that minority and poor children were failing because they were *culturally deprived*, ethnographic and linguistic studies suggested that their difficulties were probably due to *cultural discontinuities* (Baucal, 2006; Baucal & Stojanović, 2010; Cole & Bruner, 1971; Labov, 1972; Ogbu, 1987). The authors argued that conventional schools utilize and favour mainstream middle-class culture: students from minority groups have different cultural expectations and values, and these cultural and language differences, which may take the form of cognitive, communication, motivational styles or literacy styles, interact with teaching and learning to cause the problems experienced by minorities.

In the field of multicultural education, this line of research has led to new pedagogical practices. In his analysis of syllabi in multicultural teacher education in the US, Gorski (2009) showed that a large number of these courses tend to focus on *celebrating diversity* and are oriented towards what he called *teaching the other*.

These practices have faced criticism because of the essentialist conception of culture underlying the mismatch hypothesis. Differences in responses and behaviours from both teachers and students are attributed to their supposedly different cultures that pre-exist the relationship. However, this definition does not take into consideration the fact that cultures are dynamic, that it is not cultures but people who interact, and that individuals give personal meanings to the situations they experience, according to their personal trajectories and social environment. Moreover, using *culture* to interpret interactional breakdown could contribute to building cultural expectations and stereotypes, as it also implies that people should expect similar breakdowns on a regular basis, not just with one particular person, but with any person from a given community. Like Bakhtin, it might be interesting to consider instead that "it is not difference in cultures that creates interactional breakdowns but, conversely, interactional breakdowns constitute boundaries and create cultures" (Matusov et al., 2007, p. 466). We return to this hypothesis later.

Culture, social interactions and narratives.

In another strand of research, care is taken to avoid defining culture in terms of contents that can be formulated independently of the context in which they are produced. Some of the researchers here refer to Vygotsky (Bruner, 2008; Cole, 1996; Wertsch, 1991; Zittoun, 2016), sharing his interest in the relationship between mind (or self) and culture, and his question about how the mind internalizes culture. They consider that cultures are created and exist through social interactions, dialogues and shared activities (Kontopodis & Perret-

Clermont, 2016; Muller Mirza & Perret-Clermont, 2016). If cultures create institutions that permit exchanges of information, respect and affection, goods and services, and kinship obligations, these institutions in turn shape identities. However, "institutionalized cultural prescriptions (...) rarely operate just from 'outside'. In some form or another, they do indeed become 'internalized'" (Bruner, 2008, p. 35). According Bruner, one of the most powerful means that culture provides its members for internalizing and understanding deviations from shared ordinariness is *narratives*. We return to this notion below.

When this line of research is applied to the field of education, although culture is not seen as irrelevant in the classroom, differences are interpreted in terms of students' (unequal) participation (Cohen, 2006). Interactions, and in particular collaboration, are seen as a means of bridging cultural differences in the classroom (Brown & Renshaw, 2000; Chronaki, 2009; Matusov et al., 2007; Wegerif, 2007). Studies in this field demonstrate how cultural dimensions are constructed and transformed through social interactions.

Another, similar, strand of research focuses on the interdependence between self and other, between students' personal experiences and emotions in relation to their *otherness*. The following section discusses the results of observations of pedagogical practices adopting this perspective.

Introducing Emotional and Personal Experiences into the Classroom

Context of the Study

In Switzerland, as in other European countries, educational discourses have, since the 1970s, supported *intercultural* pedagogical activities designed to take account of the relational dimension and the tensions between the *universal* and the *singular* that, when taken together, are assumed to define the self. In the school context, the pedagogical aim of this model is to allow students to reflect on their own cultural references and to distance themselves from ethnocentric attitudes (Lanfranchi, Perregaux, & Thommen, 2000). Instead of *teaching the other* (as in many of the syllabi analysed by Gorski, 2009), the idea here is to *teach otherness via the self*, meaning that students are encouraged to develop the ability to reflect upon their own personal experiences and emotions when they think and act in relation to cultural diversity. However, although these intentions have been formulated in some pedagogical documents (Nicollin & Muller Mirza, 2013), research on concrete practices in the classroom has yet to be undertaken, and little is known about the psychosocial effects of this teaching. TECS[1], the research project conducted by Michèle Grossen, Stéphanie de Diesbach-Dolder, Laura Nicollin and myself, was aimed precisely at documenting current practices in lessons for cultural diversity, looking at how teachers ask their students to recount their experiences and emotions, and how they articulate personal spheres of experience with shared, collective ones. We adopted a sociocultural perspective whereby personal experiences and emotions are conceived of as an

1 Transformation of Emotions and Construction of Knowledge: Identity in Classroom Practices in Intercultural Education (TECS) project (FNS 100013_1322/92 - M. Grossen).

integral part of cognition and as semiotic events that can be redirected towards new meanings and transformed. We used the term *secondarization* to describe the process of turning personal experiences into conceptualized forms of thinking (Muller Mirza, 2016; Muller Mirza, Grossen, de Diesbach-Dolder, & Nicollin, 2014; Valsiner, 2007; Vygotsky, 1986; Zittoun, 2006).

Population, Data Collection and Methods of Analysis

Within the framework of the TECS research project conducted in the French part of Switzerland, we observed lessons designed by 12 teachers in primary (Grades Five and Six) and junior high school (Grades Eight and Nine). A total of 232 students (mean age 11–14 years) took part in the project with their teachers, recruited on a voluntary basis. The situation was representative of classes in Switzerland, in that a large proportion of the students or their parents had been born in another country. Ten of the 12 classes were *multicultural*, meaning that more than 30% of the students were not Swiss (in eight of the classes, this figure was above 60%).

The teachers were invited to design their lessons on their own, based on two materials that we provided: a *photolanguage* called *Humanity in Movement* (*L'Humanité en mouvement*, 2005), composed of 50 photographs evoking topics such as war, migration and integration; and a wordless comic book called *Where Our Fathers Go* (*Là où vont nos pères*). In the 85 video-recorded lessons, we focused our analysis on interactional sequences in which an emotion, personal experience or personal narrative was expressed in words, be it by the student or by the teacher (e.g., "It shook my heart", "My grandfather had to flee from France to Switzerland during World War II").

As the details of our analysis and results have already been reported elsewhere (Muller Mirza, 2016; Muller Mirza et al., 2014), I will focus on three observations that informed our discussion about emotions.

1. Emotions are verbalized but seldom become objects of secondarization

The teachers tended to invite their students to tell personal narratives and to share with their classmates what they thought or felt when they reflected on a situation or looked at a picture evoking topics related to migration. The students were also asked to think about what another person might think or feel in such a situation. These exercises are examples of tasks designed to develop the abilities to verbalize feelings and to take other people's perspectives, which is one of the conditions for distancing oneself from ethnocentrism, and can lead to secondarization, that is, the process whereby personal experience and emotions are turned into conceptualised forms of thinking.

However, in many of the interactive sequences we videotaped, the dialogues took the form of a minimal question-response-feedback routine, as in this example drawn from a fifth and sixth grade classroom discussion:

1. Teacher: Mmh and what do you think when you look at these photos? Can you share with me a little bit? Yeah I'm curious, yeah.

2. Alexia: Well, I took this picture because the people in it look sad and, um, it made me a little...
3. Teacher: Because the people, they look sad, that's why you chose it, yeah? (Muller Mirza, 2016).

2. Secondarization results from the interplay of personal and collective experiences

In some sequences, we were able to observe what we called an *interplay* between *unicity* and *genericity*, a discursive pattern that articulates personal experience with a more shared, collective one (Muller Mirza et al., 2014).

An illustration of this process was an interactional episode in which a teacher asked her students (11–12 years) to recount personal experiences of migration. Babette, a student, briefly described the journey of her grandfather, who had to flee from France to Switzerland during World War II, but she was not able to provide much detail. In her response, the teacher managed not only to provide historical information about this period (generic discourse), but also to explain why people who have experienced such violent and emotionally charged events, like Babette's family (unicity discourse), may not be able to talk about them.

In our view, these are powerful discursive moves, as they enable the teacher to disentangle personal experiences and emotions from their original context and turn them into a collective experience that can be shared by and with others. In the field of intercultural education, this discursive form can generate a critical distance from ethnocentrism.

3. Breakdowns

During the lessons, we also observed episodes in which the students were reluctant to provide personal narratives or even refused to make public what they felt to be private. At the end of the lessons, some teachers declared that they did not feel comfortable discussing and working with their students' personal experiences and emotions, or debating with them on societal issues such as international migration. In other cases, students (and also teachers) showed no reluctance in using or creating cultural categorizations.

These observations allowed us to show that, while personal emotions are an essential part of the learning process, their use may lead to unanticipated outcomes that can prove counterproductive in a pedagogical setting intended precisely to reduce cultural categorization and racism.

Is it possible to moderate this risk of developing effects that run counter to the pedagogical aims? In the next section, we discuss another type of educational intervention, based on the construction of narratives.

Collectively Constructing (Self-)Narratives in a Vocational School Classroom

Context of the Study

Many school activities that take place within the broad framework of education for cultural diversity are designed with one specific goal: to prevent or resolve problems defined in terms of *intercultural* tensions.

Two years ago, we were contacted by a teacher working in a vocational school in the French part of Switzerland. In one of his classes, made up of six young male adults from different national backgrounds, aged between 16 and 23 years, there was a problem of bullying, involving both physical and symbolic violence, as well as racial insults. One student even threatened one of his classmates with a knife. The fact that the students explicitly used their cultural backgrounds as insults created an *intercultural* frame of interpretation. The teacher, who was aware of our interest in intercultural education, asked us to intervene in the classroom. We (Anne Joëlle Perri Rochat and Magali Yeatman, who were both psychology master's students at Lausanne University at the time, and myself) gladly accepted this invitation, but on one condition: the activities we designed and implemented with the students would not be explicitly related to *cultures*. We felt that raising these topics would be counterproductive, as they could be used by the participants to activate and justify their own self– and other categorization. Instead, we suggested adopting a sociocultural and narrative approach.

Theoretical Framework

Our intervention drew on two notions developed within the framework of sociocultural psychology: collaborative learning and *(self)-narrative* as a psychological instrument.

Collaborative learning in the multicultural classroom.

Collaborative learning practices have been found to allow students working together as a group to accomplish shared learning goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). They not only improve students' learning by enabling them to interact and learn from other students, but also promote students' ability to collaborate (Muller Mirza & Perret-Clermont, 2009; Tartas, Baucal, & Perret-Clermont, 2010; Tielman, den Brok, Bolhuis, & Vallejo, 2012; Wegerif, Mercer, & Dawes, 1999). In her studies, Coelho (1994) showed that collaborative learning is entirely appropriate for the multicultural classroom. By sharing common goals, "the group gradually develops a sense of identity and purpose, which contributes positively to the group's interaction and to reducing the stereotypical visions about other group members" (Tielman et al., 2012, p. 106). Studies in social psychology have demonstrated the positive effect of a shared goal that supports the commitment of all the members of the group (Lewin, 1948).

(Self-)narratives as psychological instruments.

Over the past three decades, research on the relationship between constructing stories and creating identity or self has emerged in both developmental psychology and psychotherapy (Adler, 2012; Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Scholars argue that "in developing a self-narrative the individual attempts to establish coherent connections among life events (...). Such creations of narrative order may be essential in giving one's life a sense of meaning and direction" (Gergen & Gergen, 1988, p. 19).

We highlight below some of the insights gained by researchers adopting a sociocultural perspective, as they underline not only the fact that stories are the results of social interactions – since people tell stories about their personal experiences to and with others (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007) – but also the cultural dimension of narratives, in that individual and societal narratives interact in an interdependent developmental process (Daiute, 2010).

Bruner is one of the authors who have explored the intimate relationship between culture, self and narrative, focusing on "how narrative operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (1991, p. 6). He argues that "one of the principal ways in which our minds are shaped to daily life is through the stories we tell and listen to – whether truth or fiction" (Bruner, 2006, p. 230). According Bruner, there is no such thing as *a self* that stands alongside us and which we can simply describe: we are continually constructing and reconstructing our self through the stories we tell, which allow us to integrate the past, give meaning to what has occurred and continues to occur in the present, and suggest directions for the future.

According to Bruner, stories are the tools provided by cultures to come to terms with the discordances, exceptions and contradictions that make up everyday life. His idea is that it is not only the content of a story that permits us to make familiar the unfamiliar, but also the narrative form. A narrative is generally organized around five main features: 1) any story starts with a presumption of the ordinary, the initial *canonical state*; 2) then comes what Aristotle called the *peripeteia*, when the ordinary meets the unexpected; 3) next is action, that is, the efforts made by the agent(s) to restore the canonical state; 4) *resolution* is the fourth component of a story, bringing the story's action to a conclusive end; and 5) stories may have a *coda*, in the form of a commentary or lesson.

This cultural tool is needed for a culture to exist, and is used by people in their everyday lives, in particular when they experience *ruptures* (the divorce of their parents, the end of a love affair, the experience of migration, of wars, etc.). In her studies, Zittoun (2015, 2006) showed how, in rupture situations, people engage in a dynamic process of restoring a form of equilibrium, during which they tend to draw on a variety of resources, such as social relations and community life, as well as cultural elements meant to promote fictional experiences, such as novels, films and music. Among these cultural elements, narratives and self-narratives play a central role, operating as psychological instruments (or cultural resources) that allow people to lend meaning to their experiences, and explore past and present possibilities and future directions (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016).

The Intervention: Points of Departure and Structure

The intervention we developed for the vocational school was based on two main notions: 1) the construction of a narrative can be regarded as a psychological instrument that helps individuals structure their identity and lend coherence to a period marked by ruptures (all the participants were experiencing different forms of transition, between childhood and adulthood, school and the

world of work, the family environment and independent living, and different countries); and 2) activities in which a problem has to be resolved collectively can help to reduce interpersonal tensions.

We designed an intervention in which the *shared goal* was the construction of a (collective or individual) story. We told the students that the narratives would be printed in a book they could show their friends and relatives at the end of the sessions.

The instruction was to write a *self-fictional* narrative: they could therefore imagine the content, but had to integrate some personal features. Four stories had been written by the end of the four lessons: two stories were the product of the co-elaboration of two students; and two stories were written by one student working alone.

Four 90-minute lessons were organized, each structured around one of the features of the narrative described by Bruner:

– the aim of the first lesson was to define and describe the agent's *canonical environment*;
– the second served to conceive the *peripeteia*, or rupture of routine;
– in the third, the *actions* of the agent to resolve the problem were discussed, and
– in the fourth and final lesson, the *resolution* was written.

Each lesson was divided into four parts: the first introduced the topic, with the reading of a text and exercises designed to develop cooperative skills; the second promoted the construction of the narrative; the third involved searching for pictures on the Internet to illustrate the narrative, which was then written on a computer; and the fourth took the form of a collective discussion. The structure of the narrative was thus supported and articulated with the development of collective skills.

Results

General observations.

Because of the sensitivity of the context, the sessions were not recorded. The researchers did, however, field notes. They observed, for instance, that although some participants avoided conversing at the beginning of the intervention and exchanged dark looks, by the end, all the participants were able to engage in joint discussion and to participate in the collaborative activities with an open-minded attitude. One month later, the teacher, together with a nurse, organized a follow-up discussion and observed profound changes in participation. The two young men who had displayed particularly hostile behaviours towards each other at the outset, not only talked together, but referred to each other in their discourse – an indicator of reciprocal recognition (Perri Rochat & Yeatman, 2014).

We could not demonstrate a direct causal link between the intervention and the observation. Various dimensions may have affected the interpersonal dynamics and led participants to change their behaviour. We did, however, test

a *narrative* hypothesis, by analysing the stories written by the four students and viewing them as the result of a (collective) process of elaborating personal emotions through the use of the cultural form of the narrative.

Narrative analysis.

We analysed four texts: 1) "Helder isolated [Helder isolé]" written by Sergio (all names are pseudonyms), 574 words; 2) "The magic balloon [Le ballon magique]" written by Arti and Bruno, 251 words; 3) "My friend [mon petit copain]", written by Sergio, 476 words; 4) "Mockless", written by Florian and Joel, 458 words.

Bruner stated that "one of the major ways [of coming to terms with discordances, exceptions, contradictions] is through the everyday use of the story form, a medium for depicting and for resolving the inevitable clash between the conventionally expected and the seemingly unexpected, even the forbidden" (2006; p. 231).

In line with Bruner, we first focused on the *story form* of the four narratives: did they describe a *clash*? What was the clash about? How was the clash resolved?

Second, we examined the transformation of the *agent*'s identity and his or her use of resources: How did the agent resolve the *clash* at the core of the narrative? We focused here on what McAdams and McLean (2013) called the *redemption sequence*, which marks a transition in the narrative from an emotionally negative scene to a positive outcome or attribution about the self.

Were the texts narratives?

Our first question was therefore whether the students' productions could be classified as narratives, as defined by Bruner. Analysis of the structure of the texts showed that all four could be regarded as narratives[2]:

– they all began by describing a *canonical state* (a young man living with his parents and brothers who enjoys studying quietly in his room; a well-known footballer who plays with a club; a young man who spends his time in a fitness centre; a young man who enjoys tinkering with old bikes);
– this state was then *disrupted* (the young man's brothers made so much noise that he decided to leave his family; the sportsman was injured and could no longer play football; the bodybuilder was put in prison; the young man's parents refused to support his tinkering),
– this triggered a period of *actions*, during which the *hero* attempted to resolve the problem.

2 This may not seem surprising, given the task instructions, the structure of the session, and the support provided by the two psychology master's students, who helped participants achieve the shared goal. However, writing a narrative cannot be reduced simply to following instructions, as it requires the ability to structure an imaginative content in a canonical order.

Interestingly, while all the texts were fictions, they introduced personal features from the writers' everyday context, such as their parents' countries of origin, the technical school they were attending, or their own hobbies: football, bikes or rap singers. Another shared personal element was the major presence of the *family* topic in all the texts, probably attesting to the developmental transition between childhood and adulthood that the students were currently experiencing.

How did the agents resolve the problem? The redemption scenes.

As shown above, all four texts were structured around a sequence in which the hero of the story got into trouble, and all the stories ended with a positive conclusion. Moreover, the hero did not simply recover his initial state, but was *transformed*, and so was his environment: the young man returned to his family and his relatives recognized his need for peace; the injured football player was able to play again thanks to the magic balloon handled by his own son; the bike tinkerer became popular thanks to a rich man who, together with his parents, recognized his skills; the strong man started a family and a new life thanks the training he received in a vocational school. The transformation was generally made possible by external social resources (friends, relatives, or people who understood the hero's personal qualities), and the hero's personal *passions* (bikes, football, family).

When we examined the texts, we found that the *redemption* phase seemed to rely on the articulation of two phenomena that were initially viewed as contradictory: through this process, the initial tension was transformed and emotionally integrated by the hero.

Analysis of the texts showed that the redemption sequence was generally divided into four steps: 1) the initial tension is formulated, put into words by the agent (associated with negative emotions); 2) the agent decides to resolve the problem; 3) he experiences a period of torment (negative emotions); 4) the positive outcome is finally achieved when the hero finds the way to articulate what were initially regarded as two opposites (positive emotions).

The text written by Sergio (pseudonym) called "Helder isolated" is an illustration of this four-stage sequence:

1) *The initial tension.*
   Helder is described as deeply divided between his need for tranquillity and his love for his family: "Helder said to himself that it was impossible for there to be any bridge between himself and his brothers (...) or mother"[3].
2) *The decision (the first effort to resolve the tension)*
   In the face of this tension, Helder makes a difficult decision, choosing to look for tranquillity away from his family: "One day, he decided to leave and to go far away from everybody. He settled in a forest and said to himself 'here is my world, my universe'"[4].

3 "Helder se disait que c'était impossible qu'il y ait un pont entre lui et ses frères (…) ni avec sa mère" (Sergio).

4 "C'est alors qu'un jour, il prit la décision de partir loin de tout et de tous. Il partit s'installer dans une forêt et se disait à lui-même : « ici, c'est mon monde, mon univers. »".

3) *The torment.*
   However, alone in the forest, Helder is described as feeling lonely: "The group [of relatives] went into the forest and found the young man sitting calmly, but crying[5]".
4) *The final integration.*
   At the end of the text, thanks the help of the group, Helder goes back to his mother, who is in hospital, sick with sadness, and says, "You are my family, my tranquillity, my universe. My life is to stand by your side. I love you"[6].

In his conclusion, Sergio made his hero reconnect what was initially perceived of as antithetic. Here the two opposites (family vs. tranquillity) are tied by (and within) the hero's own identity, when he says "You are my family, my tranquillity". Here, the word *universe* ("You are... my universe") echoes the hero's statement during the decision phase when he chooses to leave his family and settles in a forest ("Here is my world, my universe"), as if the world of tranquillity he first tried to find in the forest were now internalized.

Interestingly, this sequence shares common components with an *initiatory journey* or *rite of passage* (van Gennep, 1909), including a phase of symbolic social death for the candidate, in some cases involving a period of isolation and suffering, and her/his rebirth in a new identity. It is this transformational phase that gives the narrative its power to support identity development.

Discussion

A socio-constructivist approach is gradually emerging in education for cultural diversity, with an emphasis on the role of emotions and personal experiences in developing a reflexive stance on *otherness*. This paper describes two pedagogical activities that adopted this broad perspective. Our aim was to gain a better understanding of the psychosocial effects of introducing emotional aspects into the learning environment.

We first observed lessons designed by teachers in education for cultural diversity in 12 primary and secondary schools in Switzerland. Our analysis showed that, under certain conditions, personal experiences and emotions are verbalized, discussed and articulated with shared knowledge and experiences, in what we called a *secondarization* process. However, working with emotions and personal experiences in the classroom appears to be a delicate practice that can be interpreted as intrusive. We also observed that one unintended consequence of the lessons was that both students and teachers used social categorizations. Introducing emotional aspects into classroom discussions can therefore have unexpected outcomes that can hinder learning.

We then designed and implemented an intervention for a vocational school where young adults in one class were facing interpersonal tensions that were

5 "Le groupe partit en direction de la forêt trouva le garçon assis, calme et qui pleurait".

6 "Vous êtes ma famille, ma tranquillité, mon univers. Ma vie est à votre côté. Je vous aime".

interpreted as intercultural conflicts. Instead of directly raising cultural issues, we chose to adopt a sociocultural and narrative theoretical framework where narratives are regarded as psychological instruments. Because a narrative has a shared cultural form, its construction may provide a means of giving one's life a personal sense of coherence articulated with a collective meaning. The objective of the sessions was to promote the development of tools that could help the young participants to structure and create new meanings for the transitions they were undergoing, and generate new interpersonal group dynamics.

Analysis of the students' narrative productions showed that the texts not only had the canonical form of a narrative, but also recounted a deep transformation of the *hero*'s identity. This transformation was not a simple *happy ending*. By the end of the story, the agent had internalized what was initially conceived of as a tension between two contradictory aspects, and was able to articulate these in a new definition of the self, the other and the environment.

Our data did not allow us to draw a direct link between the improved relationship we observed among the participants and the contents of the intervention. However, from a sociocultural and narrative perspective, we suggest that the activity of collectively writing a (self-)narrative was important for the young participants, as a narrative 1) is a form that provides a frame for testing and reflecting on the implications of identity changes in a secure way; 2) is a shared, cultural form that allows ruptures in one's life trajectory to be structured and given meaning; 3) may support the elaboration of emotions and provide a sense of continuity, particularly when it deals with what we called an *initiatory journey phase* in which two opposites are brought together. Narratives may provide a means of supporting students' ability to resolve tensions in delicate transitions and conflict situations. However, further studies of the emotional aspects of education and development are needed from a psychological and sociocultural perspective, as we can assume that it is in the interconnection between individual and collective dimensions that the self develops with, against and because of the other.

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