

## Tolerance as a value in citizenship education<sup>12</sup>

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### Abstract

*Tolerance is a polysemic notion, defined by social and humanistic sciences. Philosophers distinguish positive and negative tolerance, as an acceptance and respect or contempt and passivity directed towards people presenting ideas, behavior, and attitudes different from ours. Sociologists define tolerance as a value, which regulates people's social behavior in society. For psychologists, tolerance is an ability to forgive, consideration in regard of another man, and respect for other people's rights and autonomy. Pedagogical understanding of tolerance means a conscious countenancing for people's different ideas, even if they are not generally accepted. Pedagogues underline a role of education towards tolerance in today's much differentiated, multicultural world.*

*The article presents data gathered through a phenomenographic research strategy and through a qualitative analysis. The research started in Italy with a sample of adolescents of different country areas: Genoa for the North, Rome for the Centre, Catanzaro for the South. Considering the relevance of the theme according to Paris Declaration, 2015 it was spread out in China, Albany, Germany, USA, Latvia, Senegal and Portugal. The data demonstrated the ambiguity of students' understanding of tolerance and its connections with their age, gender, type of schools and local, cultural and social contexts of their life. Moreover the youths' written comments are proof of the deepness of feeling tolerant towards diversity. Consequently, we can reflect on worldwide premises of our democracies and on the value of inclusion. The authors share their reflections concerning the research and educational programs (action research) they plan to accomplish with the students, in aim to develop their understanding of tolerance and to build really tolerant attitudes.*

### Keywords

Tolerance, Comparative research, Values education, Citizenship

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## **1. Tolerance as critical issue in a time of increasing message of intolerance**

Talking about tolerance is not easy in a time of crisis and of falling reference values for democratic coexistence.

The post-truth world has undermined the same understanding of civil participation and destroyed the foundations of political rationality in which it was believed. The appearance of forms has become more important than reality and the erosion of solidarity has its roots in the construction of divisions. The same polysemantic notion of tolerance contains positive and negative interpretations. The tolerance it welcomes is of a positive sign, the tolerance it bears is of a negative sign; as well as respect and understanding of the other opens to the community, while passivity and withdrawal on oneself carries the sense of rejection of those who live next to us.

Walzer's (1997) discussion of tolerance as a political arena of both economic and social equality, represents an opening for the debate, so as to recognise how many obstacles there still are prior to the realisation of a project, in which we can coexist in full respect of the human dignity of each and every person. The nerve centre of this tolerance is the recognition of the differences of groups through the proposition of programmes for putting aside those possible new discriminations of an economic nature that, in the name of poverty, lead us to again give voice to our intellectual duty to choose the good and shun the bad.

Tolerance means patience, forgiveness, autonomy of the person and recognition of human rights. If the States require a philosophical project for perpetual peace, as Kant hypothesised (1795), we, as people, need a natural agreement of tolerance.

In his treaty on tolerance, Voltaire (1763) showed how a single voice thrown into an angry crowd can instigate situations of negligence, even by those in authority whose task it is to dispense justice, as divine as it is human. How can one leave a majority that condemns the innocent and even governs those who should guarantee the respect for civil, human and social rights?

Knowing how to distinguish between superstition and being able to choose the direction of respect and fraternity is the capacity Erasmus was talking about from another perspective. Weakness of minds, lack of culture, ignorance and prejudice, non-preparation to judgement calculated on facts and documents, and fanaticism may lead to simply considering anyone who does not think along the same lines guilty of a misdeed.

The assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, Minister of Minorities in Pakistan, on 2 March 2011, had raised indignation throughout the world and made it clear that dialogue among religions was still delicate and fragile.

For years, Shirin Ebadi (2006), who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his commitment to defending human rights and supporting democracy, has been a

constant testimony of the value of schools and education against ideologies that kill, such as what is also happening with Isis.

In parallel, intolerance results in as many legal and criminal occurrences as violations of religious freedom and the dignity of being human, which reach possible reparations and even extreme consequences. The political use of religion for the purpose of asserting ethnic and national identity is going through a new critical phase that challenges a much-discussed relationship between politics and religion. The law makes this relationship possible on a footing of social equality and non-discrimination, for both cultural and religious reasons. In his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, John Locke abundantly describes the risks of religion becoming a “pretext” for committing injustices:

Nobody, therefore, in fine, neither single persons nor churches, nor even commonwealths, have any just title to invade the civil rights and worldly goods of each other upon pretense of religion. Those that are of another opinion would do well to consider with themselves how pernicious a seed of discord and war, how powerful a provocation to endless hatreds, rapines, and slaughters they thereby furnish unto mankind. No peace and security, no, not so much as common friendship, can ever be established or preserved amongst men so long as this opinion prevails, that dominion is founded in grace and that religion is to be propagated by force of arms (p. 38).

There is no shortage of signs of the international recognition of the need for encounter, as the exercise of a universally recognised right, if one thinks that, just now, in 2014, the Nobel Prize was awarded to Malala Yousafzai (2013) for peace and the defence of the rights of children, referring, in particular, to women’s rights to education: a statement that tolerance is not exclusively a question of good sense, but also the sole reply to a civility that is vastly shared for our survival. It is an educational action for the formation of consciences towards a constitutional culture that democratic countries choose to pursue, as a preferred path of social responsibility and participation in the continuation of our existence.

In Italy, the study of the *Constitution of the Republic of Italy* (1948), on a theoretical level and its practical implications, constitutes a guarantee for the awareness and acquisition of the competences required for implementing those principles that represent the formalisation of national awareness and the joint focusing on common; worldwide goals of recognising the dignity of the human person (Corradini, 2014). Referred to, more specifically, is Article 3 of the Constitution that states.

All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions. It is the duty of the Republic to remove those obstacles of an economic and social nature, which constrain the freedom and equality of citizens, thereby impeding the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organisation of the country.

On this subject, and from an international standpoint, Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) underlines

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (International code of human rights, 2008).

It can definitely be said that as much the constitutional charter as international recommendations indicate the horizon value to be followed to make tolerance a way of thinking, to be acquired through the right education to the knowledge and exercise of human rights and, among these, the right to education merits special mention.

## **2. A worldwide research in progress**

Society is regulated by tolerance and when intolerance explodes, the connective tissues of living together are dismembered. In pedagogy it often says that understanding the other in a context of tolerance implies the awareness of the presence of ideas, different conceptions from one's own that it is necessary not to break down for the sole fact that we consider them outside the well-defined intellectual enclosure. Tolerance intersects with intercultural discourse and predisposes to active citizenship.

To find out what teenagers think about tolerance, we travel through various cultures with the intent of asking what the word "tolerance" means for boys and girls ages 11-15.

From Italy to Albania, from China to Senegal and Cape Verde, from Portugal to Germany, from the USA to Latvia we posed the same question and asked the teachers to propose the theme in class without explaining it, letting young people to express themselves at their best.

During the exploratory research, there were various events of intolerance, terrorism and conflict all over the world such as the attack on the newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris, January 2015, and the subsequent Paris Declaration, March 2015, on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.

## **3. Free thought of adolescents in several countries**

The data we are collecting shows that for some children to tolerate is equivalent and close the boundaries and to defend themselves by excluding those who are too different from the commonly accepted standard (China), for other children to tolerate means to assert their freedom to exist and not be prey to authoritarian

forces (Senegal). There is a certain ambiguity to be attributed to the age and social and cultural contexts of reference. In general, adolescents everywhere testify the close link between tolerance and diversity and while not mentioning the words citizenship and democracy, show that tolerance invests the political heritage that they are building with difficulty and in the uncertainty of the future.

Undoubtedly tolerance raises the question of inclusion and belonging in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies and for this reason the education to tolerate assumes the sense of education not to reject and to share common humanity, even in the variety of social conformations, political, cultural.

We do not know how much in our schools we discuss tolerance and we do not know if tolerance is practiced in the educational curricula. This question appears everywhere as relevant and for this reason in asking the question in schools, through teachers, we intended to raise the debate dear to Locke and Voltaire to remember that we cannot let our guard down in the illusion that they are all naturally tolerant because we live in companies marked by definition of respect for human rights.

We consider some of the writings of the adolescent living in Italy, Albania, China and the discussion of the themes from the classmates of other countries

In our planet differences exist and we know very well that there are differences amongst flowers, animals, human beings. Immigrants landing in our country are different from us but they are not bad persons. Quite often we tend to generalise when we refer to foreigners. When we meet foreigners in the street we tend to criticize and we tend to consider all immigrants in the same way. When we meet foreigners in the street we tend to criticize them referring to all immigrants. When on the beach hawkers trying to sell their stuff we drove them away like annoying gnats and say: "that bother these foreigners!" Basically we are all foreigners! (*Campomorone, Genoa, 16 Feb 2015 F 13 Italian Secondary school*)

Tolerance is the thing for what people live. Without tolerance, people would be like animals and this thing will cause war and pains. Kind individuals are more tolerant, they know how to speak well with someone even if he is wrong but then apologizes and asks for forgiveness. This means that he is tolerant of different situations and he is an asset to society. A gesture of forgiving someone points in the psychological state and the person even in the person who is wrong. Tolerance is this: peace and quiet. Health and communication (*Valona, 15 Feb 2015 M 14 Albanian Secondary school*).

Being tolerant means to understand and forgive others and be forgiving. A tolerant person is good and not aggressive with others. But being too tolerant is not good, it is counterproductive. Being too tolerant is a mistake, although you have good intentions. Then it goes we must be tolerant measure. I think this is the virtue of all. What I said is my thought on tolerance (*Luoyang, 18 March 2015 F 13 Chinese Secondary school*).



We asked Italian students to read the Albanians reflections and from the teacher summary after class conversation we had

...from my pupils and from me compliments for the Italian know. My students were very impressed with this aspect specifically. They were admired by a lot of effort and they have become a little 'self-criticism.

Me and colleague of support had the opportunity to talk about the value of education in other countries other than our own. Personally, I reported my experience a few years ago in Dukajiiin, where I found a respect and a love for the school that is here now forgotten. The comments of my students still primarily concerned the form of tolerance and we discussed a lot, this comparison has been used to see how students of other countries respect and consider education. I hope we were useful, greetings and congratulations from me and my class.

We asked Albanian students to read the Italian reflections and from the teacher summary after class conversation we had

My students have read the texts written by the young Italian. They really liked and the first thing I have noticed is the fact that they seem much more mature than the age they have. Another thing is the fact that much information relating to tolerance, perhaps jokingly told me "It really is so much tolerant of minorities in Italy?" However, the fact that students also cite in their themes means that there is a greater information on tolerance.

All Italian students have more or less the same ideas and are united in their thoughts and am very pleased because this means that education and instruction are well done.

A similar procedure has been followed for the Chinese students who read Italian written production.

Italian students think of tolerance in global frameworks: different religions, different cultures, different ways of thinking about life. Be far more tolerant aspects with which to open their mind and hope for a better world. In principle, the Chinese students agree with the Italians. The difference is that Chinese students have no experience of the global context and they think it is important to be tolerant concerning people, none of them have written comments on tolerance for religions, racial discrimination, the different ways of thinking and living. Reasons for difference between the Chinese and Italian students are living in different social contexts. The Chinese are in the city of Luoyang, where there are very few foreigners, so there are no problems of religions, races, or cultures. Instead in Rome there are so many foreigners of different nationalities and this is why young Italians know well the problems related to the coexistence of different cultures.

For the qualitative samples selected in Germany, Latvia, Senegal and USA, it is possible to observe that tolerance for German students is a question of acceptance of diversity (idea), for students of Latvia it is a matter of relationship

dealing with nationalities or races (ability), for students of Senegal it is freedom and not power (experience), and for students of the USA it is a community essence (need). Examples of this rationale of adolescents' thinking are:

Tolerance is to accept humans in their diversity, that they can exist and develop without difficulties. It doesn't mean not to ask questions, but to understand that humans are different and diverse in every area of their existence. Tolerance is very important as we have only this one planet where we have to live together. It is absolutely stupid to discriminate others because of little things - it makes life unnecessarily difficult. Tolerance should be natural and should not be necessary to teach others about it. We all know it and need it. Intolerance is absolutely unacceptable and has to be extinguished. Intolerance is one of the bad things that can't be accepted in this world. (Germany, Kalkar, April 2017, F 14, Gymnasium)

Tolerance - is good relationship with people of different nationalities or races. It is also the ability of a person to communicate with other people regardless their social status. (Latvia, January 2016, M 14 Secondary School)

Being tolerant means considering people as they are, their way of life, their freedom. It is also tolerate people's behavior (the way they talk, react, think ...), their freedom (peace, do not meddle too much in their personal life, do not direct them). It is to respect their opinions (its nationality, its traditions, its religion, it is not to invade the space or the life of others too much). (Senegal, Feb 2017, F 14, Secondary school)

I think that tolerance is when someone chooses to accept someone else even if they believe something other than you, act differently than you, look different than you, dress differently, etc. It is important to have tolerance because everyone is different and we need to get along with each other. Everyone has a different personality, a different way of reacting to events, and a different way of expressing themselves. Because everyone is different, we need tolerance, and if we have tolerance, those differences are okay. I think we could become more tolerant if we realize that everyone is under different circumstances, and some people have been going through difficult experiences. A lot of people are influenced to act the way they do, by certain things they are going through. We need to act kindly to these people so that we can influence them. This is why tolerance is important. (USA, October 2016, F 12, Secondary School)

#### **4. The case of Portugal**

In a similar way to that developed in other countries, several students from 4 schools in Portugal were questioned about the meaning of *Tolerance*. These schools were all located in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon, 1 of them being in the

City of Lisbon and the remaining in neighboring counties of the capital. Of the 4 schools, 3 belonged to the public network and 1 was a private Catholic School.

The question about what *tolerance* meant to students was given to students between the ages of 11 and 16, and, after a first analysis, it was possible to categorize the meanings given by students in two broad categories: Passive Tolerance and Active Tolerance.

In fact, the analysis of some of the students' answers are in line with what some authors call *passive tolerance*. Passive tolerance understood as:

- the act of bearing the other;
- the act of enduring the fact that power or courage is not stopped to prevent weakness or laxism;
- the condescending act of granting the weak to the strongest, translating anthropologically and cognitively a relationship of inequality and asymmetric difference;
- the act of permission to think, to express, to live differently, as long as it does not harm others.

As an example of these different types of passive tolerance.

It is the capacity that an individual has to put up with a person, a situation. It is knowing how to tolerate, to endure a situation that we do not agree with. Also the ability to accept people with whose ideals we do not agree, but we tolerate (Portugal, March 2018, F16, Secondary School).

A person is tolerant when tolerates many things he does not like. When you have patience (Portugal, March 2018, F15, Secondary School).

Tolerance is accepting the differences of others as they are; color, tastes, genders, etc. (Portugal, March 2018, F11, Lower Secondary School).

Accept others without changing them (Portugal, May 2017, F12, Lower Secondary School).

Tolerance is accepting the difference between all of us (Portugal, May 2017, F12, Lower Secondary School).

Tolerance is a very beautiful thing because it is accepting everything and everyone (Portugal, May 2017, F11, Lower Secondary School).

Tolerance is knowing how to accept differences without judging others. It is to see someone different from us, whether physically or believing in other beliefs and knowing that it is human, just like us. Sometimes it's hard to be tolerant. There are things, beliefs, ideals that are contrary to ours that do not make sense to us. But as long as these ideas do not harm anyone, it is knowing how to respect, to live with these people, even though they do not think exactly like us (Portugal, March 2018, F15, Secondary School).



In a different way, other students' responses are in line with the concept of *active tolerance*. What is "active" tolerance? It is "an effective way of dealing with the difference and with the eventual conflict it generates". It means more than simply accepting the existence of other groups with different norms, language, religion or beliefs, and instead interacting with them, learning from them, and using those differences to create a strong, peaceful, and thriving society.

Tolerance is a virtue that makes peace possible and contributes to replace a culture of war with a culture of peace (Portugal, May 2018, M16, Secondary School).

Tolerance is important if you are to live in community with other people. ... it is necessary to know how to accept the way of being of each one and to know how to adapt to that way (Portugal, March 2018, M14, Secondary School).

I like people the way they are. From the culture they have, people who are not tolerant are unhappy (Portugal, March 2017, F11, Lower Secondary School).

The analysis of the Portuguese students' responses also allowed us to recognize that the concept of tolerance has become imminently present and is applied to different circumstances of daily and school life, as examples such as point tolerance, drug tolerance or some types of food or tolerance to complete the exam reveals.

Tolerance is the waiting time to be able to take the exam or the tests (Portugal, March 2017, F14, Lower Secondary School).

Finally, it is important to emphasize what Anselmo Borges says about the need to go beyond the passive dimension of the act of toleration, with the purpose of dilating the concept of tolerance beyond this condescending character of a mere attestation of acceptance; in the sense of enduring something that irreducibly displeases. For the author, tolerating must become more than that; even because "(...) no one can claim to have absolute knowledge or to possess the whole truth. On the contrary, the knowledge of each one and the truth derived from that knowledge are always relative. Precisely because of this, the coexistence of different conceptions and convictions, rather than being a 'flaw or inconvenience', is above all 'a chance and a challenge' for an ever closer approximation of truth 'in common, that is, in reciprocal complementarity '. It is no longer a matter of merely 'tolerating' other convictions, but of 'expressly wanting' them; it passes from a 'passive' tolerance to 'active' tolerance, which is no longer limited to 'a form of virtue', for it is 'a condition of possibility of truth itself'" (Borges, 2004).

## 5. Conclusion

In the context of this research in Italy, Albania, China, Senegal, Portugal, Germany, USA, Latvia and Cape Verde we were able to collect several written comments of

adolescents, except from Cape Verde where we are still looking for co-operation of teachers. We consider very important to have a sample of that country for a deeper knowledge of the Cape Verdian community settled in Italy since 1960.

It is possible to draw five lines of data's interpretation.

First line concerns the *Meaning*. It is noted that the meanings of adolescent tolerance depend on a culture of the other experienced in a universalistic sense as in Germany, in a behavioral sense as in Latvia, in the sense of self-defense of one's own person as in Senegal and as form of empathy in USA.

Second line concerns *Multiculturalism*. In all cases tolerance regards respect for the other and the appeal to a multicultural society is rather absent in itself (USA), except to consider it as a presence of nationalities, traditions, religions that challenge our communication skills (Latvia), or endanger our freedom (Senegal).

In some cases, tolerance is "natural" (Germany) in other cases, it is understood that tolerance must receive a specific education to generate a better world: in Latvia it means ability in Senegal it means to have a good heart, in USA it should be a kind influence.

Third line concerns *Education*. In some cases, tolerance is "natural" (Germany) in other cases, it is understood that tolerance must receive a specific education to generate a better world: in Latvia it means ability in Senegal it means to have a good heart, in USA it should be a kind influence.

Fourth line concerns *Knowledge*. None of our adolescents has an idea of what tolerance is in our societies. Tolerance is a shared truth.

Fifth line concerns *Citizenship*. No meaning is connected to a conception of citizenship or even to the idea of democracy.

In Portugal, the interpretation of tolerance is mainly a question of ordinary school life and it seems that the argument could find more explanation in the passive or active relation with other people.

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