

## Editorial Comment: Education and Prejudice

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**Título:** Comentario Editorial: Educación y Prejuicio.

**Resumen:** Se analiza el concepto de prejuicio desde diferentes enfoques inter e intradisciplinarios así como desde una perspectiva histórica que partiendo desde el más puro universalismo ilustrado ha llegado a la globalización actual por el intermediario del relativismo cultural que caracterizó a las sociedades de los siglos XIX y XX. A continuación se analizan las implicaciones que esto tiene para la sociedad actual y se justifica el papel de la educación como instrumento para la solución de los problemas que emanan de las distintas formas de prejuicio. Esta justificación se efectúa a partir de las propuestas que emanan de DESECO para demostrar la importancia de la cooperación en la erradicación de las distintas formas de discriminación.

**Palabras clave:** Educación; prejuicio; cooperación; aprendizaje cooperativo; competencias.

**Abstract:** We analyze the concept of prejudice from different inter and intradisciplinary approaches well as from a historical perspective, starting from the purest enlightened universalism has come to today's globalization through the intermediary of cultural relativism that characterized the societies of the 19th and 20th century. Then we analyze the implications this has for society and justifies the role of education as a tool for solving problems arising from different forms of prejudice. This justification is made from DESECO's proposals to demonstrate the importance of cooperation in eradicating the various forms of discrimination.

**Key words:** Education; prejudice; cooperation; cooperative learning; competencies.

When we took the decision to take on this monograph devoted to PREJUDICE, we did so with the conviction that the complexity and wide scope of the subject would force us to forego some of its three psychological aspects - social, developmental and educational. The lot fell to the psycho-educational perspective, mainly because, as the guests co-editors state, "a serious approach from the educational perspective to the issues dealt with here would require a complete volume in itself" (Enesco and Guerrero, 2011, p.). Thus, our Editorial Comment seeks to be a connecting element between the monographic publication and a future, desirable (and let us hope prompt) volume on EDUCATION AND PREJUDICE.

The concept of prejudice, like any other concept arising from critical reflection, is related to conditioners of a cognitive, social, cultural and psychological type that, in turn, are subject to historical evolution. Hence, this notion takes on nuances and presents a different "value" according to the discipline from which it is broached and the historical moment in which it is analysed. From this viewpoint, the basic questions posed by Enesco and Guerrero (2011, p.) on the individual and collective origins of conflicts, the need to suppress these and whether their social functions would be responded to differently if they were broached from a psychological or philosophical standpoint, or even within an interdisciplinary one, but from different paradigms.

From the interdisciplinary perspective we know that there are differences, for example, in the philosophical concept of pre-judgement, with its clear links to knowledge that, in general terms, goes against the concept of judgement and which can (and should) be eliminated, as in the case of Descartes or Husserl, who sought to build up a knowledge without suppositions; in the notion of prejudice for the

sceptics, who considered it equally negative but impossible to overcome, and that the only way to avoid falling into prejudices was to avoid the formulation of judgements when a pre-judgement existed; or in that of Ortega y Gasset, who put forward a relation of inverse proportionality between judgement and pre-judgement (belief) and, therefore, the decrease in "pre-judgements" is automatically accompanied by the increase of "judgements". These positions are diametrically opposed to the socio-historical proposal of Gadamer, who postulated that men are installed in prejudices, which is the same as saying that they are immersed in a historical tradition in which they are born, they develop and within which dialogue and communication become possible. Thus prejudice, like tradition, does not (at least perforce) close down the field of understanding, but rather, instead, opens it up. In which case, since "the prejudices of individuals, much more than their judgements, are the historical reality behind their being" (Gadamer, 1965, p. 261), their elimination would, in most cases, not proceed.

From an interdisciplinary perspective, the conception of prejudice in philosophy is very different, for example, to that upheld by sciences in general and by psychology in particular. In the field of psychology, prejudice is a cognitive bias that implies the elaboration of some judgement or opinion about a person or a situation prior to determining the preponderance of the evidence or without having had any direct or real experience thereof. It is an attitude observable in all spheres and activities of society, in any social group and in any age group, and it implies a way of thinking that is intimately bound to discriminating behaviours and attitudes. As a bias, it needs, objectively, to be eliminated.

The questions raised would likewise have different answers according to the historical moment at which they were asked. Hence, when analysing them we need to study the main currents of thought in order to ascertain how "they" are described in terms of "us", in that unfolding of ideas. Here we observe how there has been a shift –I would almost dare to say a brusque shift- which has gone from the purest

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enlightened universalism that characterized western thought for the most part of the eighteenth century to the cultural relativism forged at the dawn of the nineteenth century that ran through almost to the last quarter of the last century and which, mainly on account of the globalization of politics and economics, but fundamentally of culture, has today led to a reassessment of the direct relation between the particular and the universal which is leading towards a type of cultural universalism that is simultaneously able to account for the identical and for the different.

Since in recent decades societies have undergone profound economic, social, cultural, technological and demographic changes, and given the natural resistance of individuals and societies to change for reasons of conservation, preservation and perpetuation, one of the most serious visible consequences of this metamorphosis has been the increase and diversification of intercultural and interethnic prejudices. This has spawned the appearance of numerous conflicts nurtured by such prejudices. The situation has triggered off the arrival of stereotypes that are used as pretexts to justify discriminatory and violent conducts as a way of rejecting the outsider group and, in general, all those people whose beliefs, practices and systems of values do not coincide with those of the own group.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that from the 1990s (Gilbert, Fiske and Lindzey, 1998), prejudice has been an emerging theme in study and research in social psychology and that it has continued to be so through to the present day (Fiske, Gilbert and Lindzey, 2010) due to the appearance of various systems of interpersonal relationships which have generated new forms of expressing prejudice. However, many of the studies carried out in the last twenty years have a developmental component, because prejudice and stereotypes stem childhood. Developmental research into the causal mechanisms has been a determining factor, therefore, in understanding, examining and verifying these mechanisms and it constitutes the basis of a new theoretical model (Bigler and Liben, 2007; Rutland, Killen and Abrans, 2010) that leads to the establishment of a supremacy of cooperation processes as a tool to change stereotypes and reduce prejudices.

Due precisely to the convergence of these two disciplines, *Anales de Psicología* has brought together in this special issue social and cognitive-developmental psychologists from universities, departments and interuniversity research groups with a long tradition in this area of psycho-social knowledge, whose research has been disseminated throughout the scientific community in the most prestigious journals of both fields, like *Child Development* or the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

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The situation we have just outlined, and which McCarthy (1993) called the «crisis of representation» prior to the huge social and socio-cognitive crisis in which we are doomed,

can only be resolved through symmetric and effective multicultural communications, i.e. by conferring power to others to intervene as participants with equal rights and duties in this transformation. The time has come to “give permission to diversity” (Shweder, 1969, p. 99).

Yet what we have just put forward will not be solved by the sole socio-cognitive ideas of a few thinkers reflecting on this reality for the questions here are not purely and exclusively epistemological, but are, one might go so far as to say, in the main questions of a socio-political and moral nature. Therefore, it is up to governments to take the initiative to drive out any type of cultural Manichaeism, and give this new multicultural discourse an effective character and the only reasonable way of structuring it is to use a process based on normative symmetry, i.e. through reciprocal understanding and balanced discussion of the differences and, given the resistance to change we mentioned above, this can only be done through EDUCATION.

Today's societies are aware that the education processes that can respond to the binomial globalization-modernization conjunction that is creating an ever more diverse and inter-connected world in which cooperation appears to be the *sine qua non* condition for these processes to be successful. They therefore demand that people respond to the challenge that complexity presents, that they do so with tools that guarantee the success of this complicated and protracted task. These tools receive the name of competencies and they respond to the fact that today people must face up to in their lives (Figure 1):

- a) new individual challenges (mastering changing technologies, understanding the growing amount of knowledge available, selecting, organizing and elaborating this information, etc.) and
- b) the need to find solutions to collective balance-seeking problems (economic growth and sustainability, prosperity, social equity, etc.).

These competencies comprise abilities that allow one to tackle complex tasks successfully using the psycho-social resources mustered in a particular context and which take in knowledge, skills, attitudes, norms and values (OECD Ministries of Education).

This structure that DeSeCo attributes to these competencies and which we have modified (Serrano and Pons, 2011, p. 18) postulates the three-dimensional nature of a competence (Figure 2): the cognitive dimension (declarative and procedural knowledge); the metacognitive dimension (conditional knowledge); and the non cognitive dimension (causal knowledge, which envelops attitudes, norms and values). If we focus on the last of these, we can state that

- the norms are a set of rules that indicate how we should behave in different social situations, i.e. what should and should not be done;
- the values are the qualities that the norms embody and through which they are socially estimable; they have polar-

ity in that they are positive and negative, and also hierarchy, to the extent that they are superior and inferior;

- the attitudes are predispositions to respond consistently to a social object in line with the set of norms and the system of values.

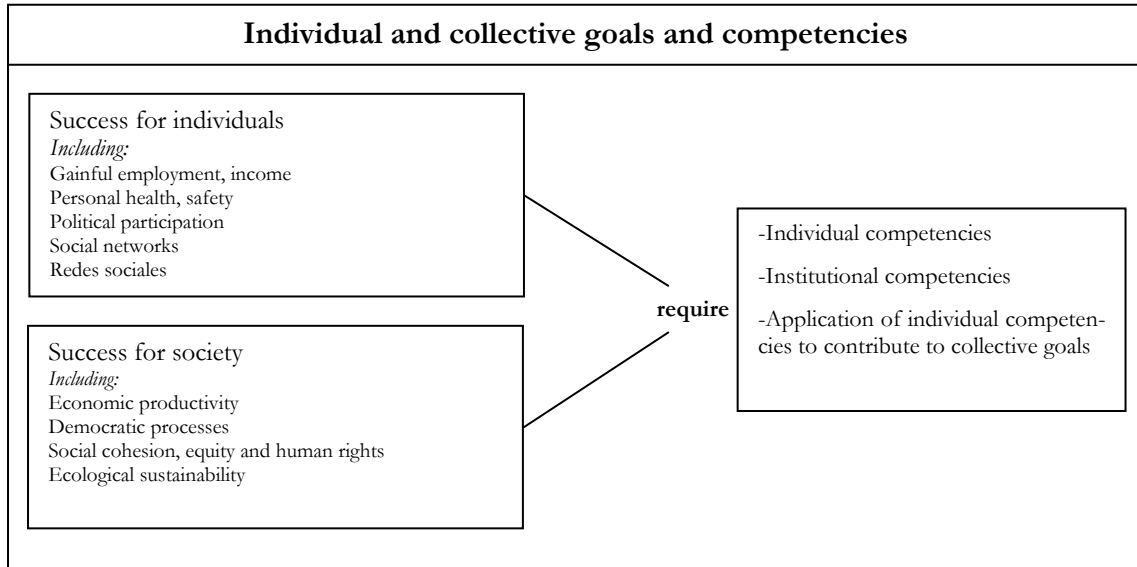
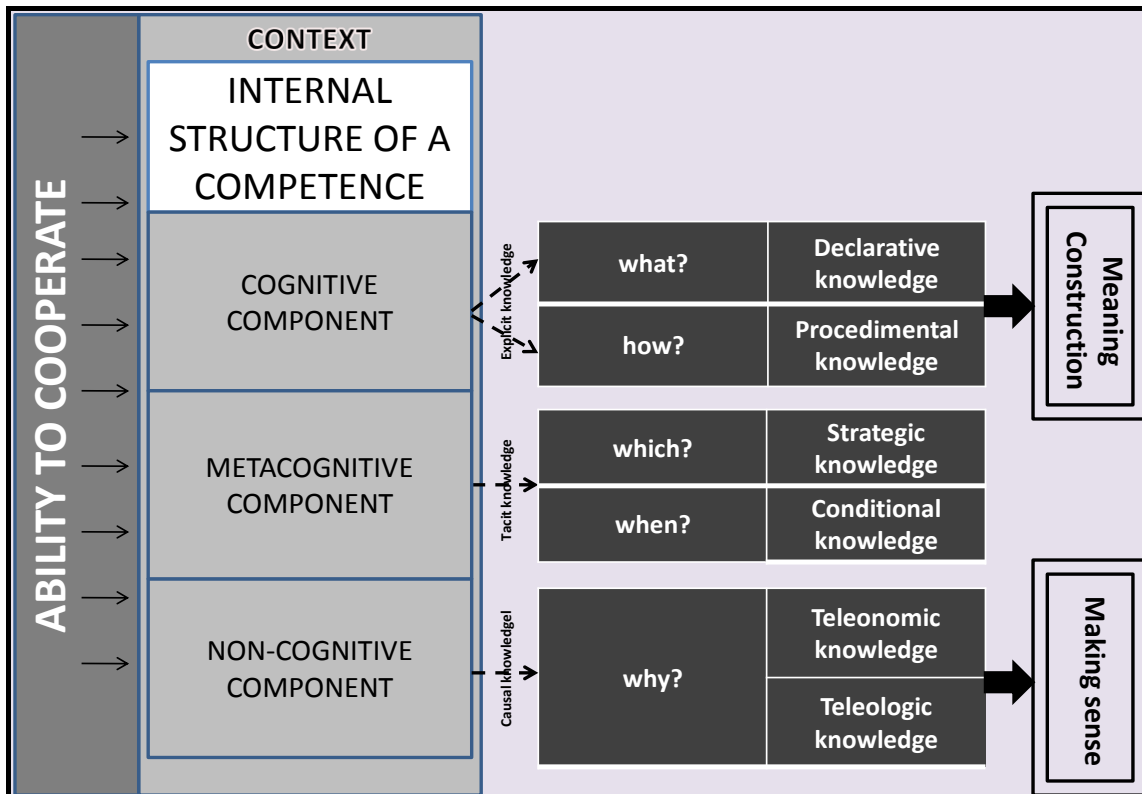


Figure 1: Competencies and goals of DESECO.



These three hierarchical elements which constitute the base on which the subject can construct social representations are not innate; they are acquired by a process of construction that has a social component, insofar as they are acquired through mechanisms of interaction, and a personal component, in that they need to be internalized.

During the acquisition of this norm and value based system, one cannot, at least in the initial stages, fully appreciate this constructive process since the child, to a large extent, reproduces what is transmitted. Nevertheless, although the first acquisitions depend on the social and cultural medium in which the child is immersed (the developmental niche), there already exists a process of assimilation of norms and values into the child's schemas which enables him to adopt an "individualized" stance that generates the first behavioural predispositions towards the various social objects, that is, the first attitudes towards the others. So it is not strange that manuals on Child Education include, as essential, a chapter on education in values (Bolívar, 2003).

The system of values can undergo adjustments during development, fundamentally when people see themselves in need of an explanation of the set of norms that sustain it. Thus, once built, it allows the norms and values to be explained and justified. This process supposes a long journey of successive constructions and reconstructions that show a clear parallelism with the general stages of development.

In the first two years of life the norms are not coercive because they are merely motors and are adhered to unconsciously (motor norms). However, with the arrival of representation, the child begins to receive direct information about the norm and incorporates it into a rigid structural system where there is little movement of the (cognitive and social) schemes, and so the norm is taken to be fixed and immutable (centring on the states with no awareness of transformations) and it therefore has a coercive nature. Mobility of the schemes (reversibility), attained in the specific operational sub-period, will give way to a period of growing cooperation that determines the normative system will develop towards the construction of the arbitrary character of the norm and the need to agree on it (rationalization of the norm). This development paves the way followed by the normative system of the individual from the heteronomy (compulsory norms) to autonomy (cooperative norms).

When the norms enter the autonomous space they become subjected to a process of social and individual assessment that marks the polarity and hierarchy of the norm. This double assessment means that each individual tries to adapt her assessments to those elaborated by others, and so the cooperative norms require a process of negotiation, which leads to the socio-cognitive need to share the norm. Hence, individual values lead to the elaboration of a social system of values, and so the inherent values of any society at a specific historical moment are the result of a more or less constant flow of balances-imbbalances-rebalances.

Once this system of values has been built, the subject has a tool that will allow him or her to find consistent re-

sponses to the demands made by the social objects, which is what we call attitude. Attitudes make up behaviour patterns with regard to situations and they have an adaptive base that allows time-saving when generating responses and taking decisions in certain circumstances. Thus, being predisposed to an event, person or thing makes it easier to respond to them, because there is no need to carry out a deep assessment every time there is any proximity. In other words, an attitude is a predisposition to respond in a certain manner to a stimulus, without having sufficient previous knowledge (prejudice: to judge with no previous knowledge).

Prejudice would, therefore be a cognitive bias that generates a personal predisposition, based on a system of categories, that translates into real and observable behaviours (manifest prejudice) or hidden ones (subtle prejudice), with positive contents (acceptance) or negative ones (rejection) regarding a person or group of people according to their (real or imaginary) social characteristics, and which generally goes under the broad name of (positive or negative) discrimination. While prejudice arises from convenience or the need to discriminate, discard, dominate or accept other people or groups, without remorse or without reflecting on the rights and wrongs of it, or whether it is an objective or subjective opinion, it is in general a hostile (very rarely is it favourable) attitude, and therefore the universally accepted meaning of the concept of prejudice rests on the negative contents that lead to negative discrimination.

Be that as it may, although prejudices arise or may arise from insufficient knowledge of a situation, they can continue to exist (or, if you prefer, persist) even after deeper knowledge has been gained, since prejudice implies a conviction and, therefore, resistance to change. This is why one of the most interesting characteristics of prejudices is how difficult it is to eliminate them.

While there are many theories on the origins of prejudice, it seems clear that its origin lies in the need that we have to distinguish ourselves from the other and build our own self and, clearly, the moment that there is awareness of the existence of people who are different from oneself, or groups that are different from one's own, the process of individual and social distinction will begin. Indeed, social categorization is an elementary way people use to organize their environment, by grouping and distinguishing, according to characteristics they deem essential, whom they resemble (ingroup) and from whom they are different (outgroup). People tend to group according to certain characteristics (affirmations) and leave out other individuals with whom they do not identify (negations). Within this natural selection, while there is not necessarily any negative disposition or attitude towards the other group, there is, nevertheless, a positive vision of what is one's own versus a neutral attitude toward the different group (group bias) that, although not being prejudice, on account of its lacking negative connotations, does constitute an essential aspect of its explanation. The progressive distinction with the outgroup fosters the strengthening social identity of one's own group, and is a

fundamental issue in generating nationalistic feeling or family and institutional attachment. The prejudice will stem from this process of distinguishing, but with the incorporation of negative connotations towards the alien group. Prejudice tends to increase as the group begins to perceive that others may threaten its integrity, stability or union or when a threat exists to any important aspect of the group, as may be provoked by political, religious, economic or linguistic characteristics. In short, the need to reaffirm the group's self-esteem is the origin, impetus, drive and upholder of prejudices.

In his *Novum Organum Scientiarum* (1620), Bacon states that prejudices occur because small children (from the moment they are born) learn first what their family or society thinks of the world, a long time before they can become aware of the experiences and phenomena that define it in themselves. Thus, while a person may develop the capacity to distinguish persons and objects from a very early age by categorization, having a negative attitude toward those differences is an environmental influence (probably attained from observed behaviour, linguistic expressions that evoke a distorted view of reality, etc.). Bigler and Liben (2006) postulate that categorization is not sufficient to explain prejudice, and that adult intervention is required for this categorization to develop into the stereotypes that generate prejudices. In this sense, all theories on the aetiology of prejudice put forward intervention models to reduce the effects of stereotypes, and all of them are based on increasing interactions and relationships of positive interdependence (McKown, 2005). It is not surprising, then, that even were it not a

methodological tool conceived for this end (Slavin and Cooper, 1999), cooperative learning should have become a basic instrument in tackling this problem in the school setting. Thus, one proposal will attain greater and greater consistency is that which considers that "to reduce prejudice and discrimination ... the schools are built on the Three Cs Program: Establishing a *cooperative community*; resolving *conflicts constructively*; and internalizing *civic values*" (Johnson & Johnson, 2000a, pp. 239-240).

Furthermore, recent findings appear to confirm that participation in cooperative learning provides students with a more accurate view of intercultural, interethnic or sexually oriented differences in conflict solving, bullying, etc. (Dessel, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 2000b; Lam and Moodley, 2011 in this issue).

However, while prejudice can only be got rid of through education, because social perceptions and interests can only be acquired, developed and modified within a truly social medium, the programmes of education in values and teaching methods that have cooperation as their standard will only be properly effective if the school transforms itself into a living community, with all that this implies – the typification of social life in the classroom (Dewey, 1916, pp. 298-299). Hence, it is not sufficient for the pupils to know what norms are good and desirable (cognitive aspect) or that they act according to them (behavioural aspect), rather they need to take on board the principle declared by Gregorio Marañón: "you will not know my real worth while I unable to be, together with you, all that I am" ..

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