A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERCULTURAL RESEARCH
Laboratory for Research on Intercultural Relations

Why a Framework?

There are many ways of doing intercultural research. This is why it is important to define our particular approach to research in this wide-ranging field of study. By articulating a framework for intercultural research we set out to:

- identify the theoretical and methodological foundations that underlie our research in order to better orient our work;
- explain, to our partners as well as members of the larger research community, the tools and evaluation criteria that we use when we analyse intercultural dynamics;

The framework proposed here is to be read as an initial response to these questions, but it also provides a general horizon or roadmap for the work we plan to do in the future.

Epistemological Orientations

To begin with, we have identified three epistemological orientations that reflect the different ways that observers perceive an object of study:

- The modernist orientation adheres to the central idea of objectivity and distance that comes from the tenets of the Enlightenment.
- Post-modernism, in contrast, insists on the importance of the subject, arguing that it is impossible to achieve scientific objectivity.
- Hermeneutics, by introducing the question of intersubjectivity, attempts to join these two orientations. This orientation attempts to achieve objectivity with the knowledge that such an objective is most likely impossible.

Ideological Orientations

Secondly, we have identified three ways of attempting to come to terms with difference when it comes to concrete action or practice:

- The diversity approach places emphasis on the recognition, promotion and protection of diversity;
- The discrimination approach seeks to denounce social inequalities and protect those who are vulnerable;
- The dialogue approach aims to facilitate encounters and reduce disparities with the aim of moving toward rapprochement.

According to our analysis, the policies and programs that strike a balance between these approaches tend to be more intercultural in orientation.
**Theoretical Frameworks**

The Systemic Approach (Bateson, Palo Alto)

- Analysis of different levels as different points of view;
- Levels interact with one another;
- The level we examine can have an impact on the analysis;
- The importance navigating at least three levels: universal, group, individual.

The Hermeneutic Approach (Gadamer, Ricœur)

- We always interpret from a particular perspective or experience;
- Understanding is steeped in anticipation;
- Preconceptions stem from cultural and social traditions
- Preconceptions can be put to use in situations of encounter;
- In this sense, prejudice is not only normal, but can be positive.

Intercultural Philosophy (Panikkar)

- “No one possesses the absolute criteria to judge the world of others”;
- Bringing distinct worlds together in the same space of observation;
- Reflection and analysis are forms of co-construction;
- Western civilisation, especially colonial culture, is a form of cultural hegemony.

**Methodological Framework**

Ethnographic Method

- Systematic collection of qualitative data
- Intensive, long-term fieldwork
- Participation Observation AND interviews
- Ethnographer
  - Should be attentive to the diversity at the heart of the group
  - Identify with a point of view that is situated both inside and outside
  - Work with an approach that is generally inductive

Collaboration

- Offers an expertise that is also a form of accompaniment;
- Sharing of data as well as authority;
- Use of feedback at every step of the process (see Lassiter 2005).

- Important links exists between collaborative and intercultural approaches (active listening, epistemological posture, interest in the vision of the other, pragmatism, etc.).
Analytic Framework

Third, a literature survey suggests that most intercultural frameworks include three moments of intercultural communication

A) The Shock of Difference
Provoked by the encounter with the other, the self becomes conscious of his or her cultural and social positioning. By analyzing his or her prejudice, the self is required to confront new ideas and challenged by the intensity of moral emotional response.

B) Mutual Explicitation
Moving between the particular and universal, self and Other seeks to name those things they share and those they do not. This attempt at mutual explicitation offers an opportunity to confront differences in a space where self and Other examine not only their relative complexities but also the dynamics of their encounter.

C) Toward a Common Signification
This is the moment where the enigma of the encounter seems to be resolved and the possibility of rapprochement (political, epistemological or other) presents itself. This can take the form of a decision, an action or simply an agreement to continue working toward a newly shared horizon.