

For an Hermeneutics of Pedagogical Thought

Ideas for Committed Education

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to argue the necessity of rethinking our current approach to pedagogy outlining the social need both for critical and creative use of communication as well as for a cosmopolitan engagement through education. The dimension in which we operate – global and local at the same time – requires the overcoming of the mere competences and leads towards the need to promote citizens and consciences which are not short-sighted: it is necessary to refer to a polyhedric idea of political formation portending collaborative future strategies, involving persons from multiple culture or diversely situated within cultures, giving rise to triangular relations. To pursue quality, to make responsible, to anticipate these are some of the mechanisms through which education could be a social accelerator for its capacity to resist processes that tend to compress the inner life, for its ability to spread awareness, to fertilize crosswise politics, economics, information. Pedagogy and pedagogical can reveal their indispensability as hard work of relational thinking in the perspective of a farsighted socio-historical vision – that today is dramatically lacking to our politics – as activation of a “system” of intelligence[...].*

Riassunto: *Le riflessioni affidate a questo scritto tematizzano la necessità di ripensare l'approccio attuale alla pedagogia delineando il bisogno sociale di un uso critico e creativo della comunicazione, nonché di un impegno cosmopolita perseguito attraverso l'educazione. La dimensione in cui operiamo – globale e locale allo stesso tempo, richiede il superamento delle semplici competenze e conduce alla formazione di cittadini e di coscienze che non siano miopi: è necessario fare riferimento a un concetto poliedrico di formazione politica foriera di future strategie collaborative, coinvolgendo persone di molteplici culture o diversamente situate all'interno delle culture. Perseguire la qualità, rendere responsabili, anticipare questi sono alcuni dei meccanismi attraverso i quali l'istruzione potrebbe essere un acceleratore sociale per la sua capacità di resistere a processi che tendono a comprimere la vita interiore, per la sua capacità di diffondere la consapevolezza, per fertilizzare politiche trasversali, economia e informazione. La ricerca pedagogica è in grado di rivelare la sua indispensabilità come rigoroso lavoro del pensiero relazionale nella prospettiva di una lungimirante visione storico-sociale – che oggi manca alla nostra politica – come attivazione di un “sistema” di intelligenze[...]*

Keywords: *Pedagogical thought, Education, Communication, Commitment.*

EDUCATION SCIENCES & SOCIETY

*«For unto everyone that hath shall be given,
and he shall have abundance.
But from him that hath not shall be taken away
even that which he hath»
Matthew 25:29*

1. Ethics of Education and the New World Order

We often question ourselves on what does society actually wish to achieve through education: this inquiry demands evaluation of the major goal of educational experiences and activities. The aim of education and formation is to help individuals to discover their special gifts and to praise the diversity of life by developing their skills and satisfy their own needs, but also by ensuring the most efficient differentiation of society into professional commitments. The purpose of this paper is to argue the necessity of rethinking our current approach to pedagogy outlining the social need both for critical and creative use of communication as well as for a cosmopolitan engagement through education.

In contemporary society, within an healthy environment, the values of education should be based both on a philosophical ground and on a teleological factor: the autonomy of judgement as well as the process of knowledge make the subject able of correlation, solidarity, capable to recognize her/his competence as a valid resource to compete in the configuration of a policy of social protection. Inquiry into such moral and social matters is a revaluation or trans-valuation of what is considered valuable in education, in light of its capacity for response to current circumstances and future problems. The dimension in which we operate – global and local at the same time – requires the overcoming of the mere competences and leads towards the need to promote citizens and consciences which are not short-sighted: it is necessary to refer to a polyhedric idea of political formation portending collaborative future strategies, involving persons from multiple culture or diversely situated within cultures, giving rise to triangular relations. To contribute to the challenge in the making of a cosmopolitan world order we have to relate to some fundamental issues: the objectivity of human possibilities; the diversity of cultural identities and the universality of belief – whether religious or lay –; the prevalence of poverty in the midst of a globalized trade; the spirit of trade itself and the paradoxes of the markets (Appiah, 2006).

RI-PENSARE LA PEDAGOGIA, RI-PENSARE L'EDUCAZIONE

Today our environment is not only nature, but also technological cohesion and conjuncture and human culture: the structure of these three elements in their mutual influence on each other constitutes the cubic construction of acting. In the domain of culture, we must keep a balance between globalization and individualization or localization: in the technological cohesion or conjuncture the globalization of languages means unification under one dominant language, while suppressing other languages. Too often younger generations are regarded as guards for rich and powerful structures that only look after their own interests: the lack of moral legacies in the productive systems becomes the cause of frustration of the youth whose future is manipulated by the bustle of the markets. Hence the critical pedagogical question whether the diffusion, or rather the economic hegemony, denoted exclusively by money, may be the only form of thought and language to educate the whole humanity. Contemporary upbringing and training are constantly affected by the dogmatism of a single system of thought, whose criteria are productivity, efficiency, calculation: a system of thought caught in usability of the medium that often reduces the alternative thoughts to marginal thoughts (Bataille, 1976; Levinas, 1993). When economics becomes the expression of the world, it determines a quality of thought, a kind of rationality (the word “reason” was born in the economic sphere, being the “*ratio*” the compensation within an exchange: *redde rationem*) which is limited to calculate: Heidegger spoke of “calculative thinking” (*Denken als Rechnen*), able to operate only through numbers, to look at the advantages and disadvantages, profits and losses, configuring itself only as utility.

We must remember that mind is calculating, but in the mind the thought is not calculating: thinking while continuing to live in the natural functioning of the calculation transcends it, because as a human act, thought is existence, is the self being outside of itself. Life operations are calculation, but life organized as mere calculation would be just survival. If life lives, that is renews itself, grows, evolves, it is so for least miscalculations, abnormalities, projections of what currently it is not. In other words, thinking is living without clashing one's own living: it means to be immersed in life but not overwhelmed by it, always preserving the possibility of exits and stops. The opportunity to keep “educating” our thinking can be strengthened by ethics as a resource, in a way that ethics becomes highly important for the whole society – individuals, institutions, companies – and can be identified through the production of new experiences, a practice where each change

is perceived as an interior act, as an act of individual will that can be transformed in collective responsibility. In this perspective, the opportunity is not a challenge to engage in actions against the technique: which would be like denying ourselves, denying the enterprise of knowledge and practice, through which we built our own humanity and introduced unprecedented differences into the world. The opportunity is quite a passionate challenge to master ourselves, because we ourselves are the technique, it is our third kind of nature (after the first genetic-physiological and the second cultural historical).

This implies a serious commitment concerning the time it takes for quality thinking: time is the essence of our life and this awareness is not just a psychological or philosophical matter but also a pedagogical one. The aim is to focus on human activities in all their aspects in relation both to persons and things, as to technology and environment. Access to a right relationship with technology is acquired at the price of an intellectual effort. But the lack of serious efforts on the part of the “humanities” has resulted in a “pedagogical” disregard for our technological societies, while, both industry and economy have grown so autonomous that they have liberated themselves from the constraints of moral conviction, becoming symbols of prosperity (Etzioni, 1988). The pedagogical thought should face the role of science and technology in their continuous interactions both with economics and the difficult human challenges in the contexts of labour-market. Our modern habitat refers to a world of technological goods whose complexity grows every day and makes us desire more information pertaining to the diffusion of such objects. The role of “technicians”, in a social community, brings a new and irreplaceable element, that of direct dialogue with certain goods, as long as their codes stay hidden or inaccessible to most people in a community. As the practice of classical texts, so the practice of technological codes is necessary to ensure our existence a proper orientation. Socio-scientific issues are important to citizenship and the ability to engage with the social consequences of science and to make reasoned and informed decisions is vital for citizens. The capacity to make considered choices is an important aspect of active citizenship and everyone should possess sufficient scientific literacy to engage with national and global debates, for instance on which sorts of power stations should supply our energy needs as well as more local issues such as where to site electricity pylons. Citizens should be sufficiently informed to voice opinions about stem-cell research, genetically modified foods, in-vitro fertilization treatment and genetic en-

RI-PENSARE LA PEDAGOGIA, RI-PENSARE L'EDUCAZIONE

gineering. A finer perception of ethical, medical, environmental, financial and social implications of techno-scientific developments is required as well as should be considered the checks and balances that society has in place to monitor and regulate 'advances'. Ignorance entails personal risk but also risks to society (Simondon, 2007; Chardel, Schmitt, 2009).

The pedagogical challenge, within a new world order, not only is to extend the ethics of a new responsibility to the instructive domain, but to corroborate the social processes promoted by means of it. In relation to normative ideas and ideals, the educational-philosophical discussion contributes to the public discourse by problematically analyzing and interpreting social practices that eventually constitutes educational normativity. In this respect, philosophy of education is an experimental thinking to carry out moral evaluations beyond mere individual or cultural preference into a realm of existing conditions and effects. Everything is more complicated than it seems to be: what is presented to us has behind it something hidden that makes it possible. In our world, full of myths, slogans, simplifications, the task of the pedagogical is to remove these myths and show what's behind the simplifications, making things more complex, because if we can see what is behind the appearance of things, we improve our being in the world in a more real, aware and critical way. We ought to educate to distrust superficiality, not for a taste of complication's sake, but because vagueness is often misleading, deceptive, ideological. It is a question of meaningful action what makes pedagogy a "political" issue.

If we extend this spirit of deconstruction to the "living world" the problem of education stands out in its entirety, at the center of a rich reflection, and thus assume main importance the concepts of *Bildung* as self-engagement. We can certainly say, that education is complete only when every person has, in proportion to his/her capacity, an equal responsibility in shaping the goals and policies of social groups to which he/she belongs: this determines the true meaning of democracy.

2. Cultivating communication

The recognition of community as a place of any unavoidable human planning and at the same time as an exercise of freedom of communication, inspired by the democratic nature of scientific research – fallibly built through always reviewable solutions – raises both the political issue of im-

plementation of its model in other contexts of human life, and especially the problem of the role of invention within ethics. The invention of responsibility – a major shift in ethical thinking, in the sense that the aesthetic becomes a complement to the moral – is intimately connected to the notion of “feeling”, as the root of the whole cognitive process. The feeling can establish a different opening to reality which above all is “believed” sooner than “known”, in fact it discloses a reality which establishes itself in the act of being primarily known as felt (James, 1890). The strength of conviction that arises from this act, from such empathic understanding of reality, escapes the canons of ordinary logic, since it is the typical strength of conviction conveyed and transmitted in general by the dynamics of emotions, and succeeds in giving us access to the “inter-relatedness”.

The invention of responsibility, ought to be the task of a real education, undertook to ensure that human beings, with the strengthening of their intellectual faculties, will not exhibit the hypertrophy of thought and the anesthesia of feeling (sentiment). Furthermore, it would be functional to the recovery of a concreteness of duties, since over and beyond any discourse of responsibility, one’s own duties vary as one’s own circumstances vary, and they are also contingent on the opportunities that present themselves.

The philosophers Husserl and Habermas agreed on pointing out a specific difficulty of modern society. Diverging from the positivistic thought, that considered modern society to be the highest achievement of mankind, they declared that European culture and humanity suffered a total crisis. According to Husserl the crisis originated in the crisis of philosophy. Habermas considered the European “pathology” related to “the colonization of the life world” by what he called system. (Husserl, 1970; Habermas, 1984)

They both thought that the possibility to overcome the crisis of modern culture was a different exploitation of reason or rationality. This implies that the concept of rationality pursued by them was different from the positivistic concept of instrumental rationality, which was too narrow to overcome the crisis of modern society. They pursued a new form of critical rationality: Husserl’s theory of a communicative action was a theory of critical rationality, as well as Habermas’ theory of communicative action was mostly critical towards contemporary social sciences that, limited in the interpretation of the “pathology” of modern society, were unable to solve various problems confronting it. According to Habermas, the sufferance of modern society – rooted in the distortion of the system of communication

that is peculiar to life-world – could be overcome by recovering a new form of communicative rationality that should have the power to comprehend the complexity of society in its wholeness. Communication considered as a creative act that generates certain attitudinal, intellectual, emotional and behavioral responses, can literally shape our social world and future.

In light of these reflections we can place confidence in the individual initiative to use the principle of communication: the gap between intention and human action, between programs and results, warns us in the presence of any reasonable course of danger, naturally forcing us to dialogue, and this obstinate will of dialogue is full of ethical research that specifically translates itself into an ethical invention. Today ethics is often claimed to be purely private, doomed to remain confined to the private life of the feeling subject, but any speaking subject is posited together with the other subjects, acknowledged as virtual partners in her/his discourse, as stated by Karl-Otto Apel's idea of a "transcendental synthesis of communication". Since human action is the cause that triggers new risks and poses new problems to society, any choice of possible solutions and decisions to be taken – in addition to scientists with their data, politicians and their ideologies, business with their interests – has to involve the social subjects that suffer the consequences of these choices in their material concreteness, which connects itself to needs, living conditions and expectations for the future. Every human being is not in the world as a content in a container. S/he is not inactive in one place, or in her/his objective identity: while remaining in it s/he comes out of it, breaks it, leans out, comprehends the reality where s/he is located and in relation to her/himself gives it a meaning. S/he not only, like all other living beings, re-acts to external stimuli and to those of her/his own body, but suffers, imagines, invents original answers, acts in the strongest sense, becomes culture, pattern of institutions, in short, becomes communication, weaving passions and actions.

The fact that mankind lives within a "web" of connections is also the fundamental idea of pedagogy. The conception of pedagogy and educational practices could not fulfill its requirements if there wasn't a intergenerational community of communication: if it was not worth to pass on "something" from somebody to somebody else, the notion of pedagogy would not be possible at all. Since education is an activity engaged to bring about change, its fundamental idea implies that educators and scholars have the possibility to effect change in those at whom their educational efforts are directed. To give up the idea that educators can effect change is to give up

the idea of education itself. Yet educators do not generally conceive of their efforts in terms of creation or production, that is, in terms of engaged influence (Kemp, 1973).

Teachers do not assume that they create their students; they rather start from the assumption that their students are self-active and (potentially) independent human beings. This implies that the activity of education does not create or produce its own object but intervening into autonomous processes, such as growth or development, that are already occurring, ties a free person to his/her freedom.

Within this framework Immanuel Kant's philosophy influenced most the field of education, particularly his ideas about individual human consciousness as the transcendental condition of thinking and acting. Kant's philosophy led to a subject-centered analysis of the reality of education in the perspective of the educative process as social phenomenon. According to Kant education contains an element of universal care and constitutes a reality *sui generis*, which can and should be analyzed in its own terms: in terms of communication and social interaction (Kant, 2003).

If we ask the question how can education convey its meaning, the answer is: through participation in the social practices in which this meaning is formed and transformed. What is or is not possible when education takes place as communication? It is a question that can be specified in many regards, by taking into account the specific characteristics of the situations in which each subject takes part. The conditions of the possibility of education are not a-historical, transcendental conditions, they always depend upon the situations in which the younger and older generations structure their own environment – which structures how communication and cooperation can be established among the participants. The questions therefore are how educational meaning can influence social or communicative situations, how different historical conditions can share the ways educational interaction puts into practice. The action of sharing has its own origin and point of semantic departure in the expression taking part. It deals with an expression that represents, in the perspective of citizenship, a right to share and to contribute to the management of life in community, in the social structures in general as well as in a particularly constituted collectivity. In short, education is not a matter of the subordination of natural impulses to absolute values, including those of social engineering, but rather of socializing natural impulses in ways that reconstruct them as constructive and expansive rather than *reductive*, and far-ranging and comprehensive rather

than exclusive. And the test, that can be suggested, is whether such socialization encourages the expansion of the learner's intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic horizons, and whether the learner and the group of which he/she is a member becomes more comprehensive in terms of their connections and interrelations with other socializing forces.

One of the most important dimensions of a true participatory view of communication is that it moves meaning from the intentions of individual subjects towards the social practices which are constituted by cooperative and coordinate actions. The participatory approach of communication holds that meaning exists both in social practices and in the minds of individuals. In education and other complex interaction situations, two kinds of worlds play a role, namely the 'inner world' of the different participants and the 'social world' of the interaction itself. The common idea that education is in essence a relationship between teacher and student, or parent and child, makes this fact invisible: it masks the many commitments of educational practices.

The mechanistic separation between the subject and world, with the isolation of human beings from their own history, offers only the possibility to relate to history from a distance, of looking at history: the subject who does not live his/her history, looks at how a society implements itself, and from time to time, perhaps, writes his/her own word. If the dynamic of belonging weakens, individuals feel orphans, forgiven the rules, mortify the intelligence, tend to crumble the collective and family ties. In this perspective it results a contrast – or even a paradox – that freedom is not an attribute of an isolated individual, but a means of relationships between individuals: freedom is individuated but its individuation results from the process of interaction. So the educational praxis becomes the cultural segment more effective to ensure a place of the spirit, a space of the relation in which the individual knows he/she finds him/herself and can also find the intentional unity in act, in its multiple ways of being and acting. Within the educational relationship is essential what flows above and below the system of knowledge, in a path of meta-messages where is shown the rush of desires, where motivations and prohibitions multiply, consonances and convictions asserted, logic and affectivity involved, in order to resolve otherwise the elements of a picture that envelops the geometries of acting and knowing. The positive value of a responsible growth, individual and collective, strengthens the sustainability of the social role of education and learning, and enhances the horizontal dimension of acting – compared to

the vertical dimension, which rises to the super-concepts and the super-facts- horizontal dimension – along which the contingent weavings of signs and mental sounds that are the human beings, find meeting points of agreement. People's wellness is a matter of deliberate effort: meaning by deliberate effort, those things in people that they become capable of through learning and through working at them. The growth paths that education and research activate are the elements that can fertilize a country and its productive capacity. The machine of wealth is an invisible machine, contained in the brains of individuals, it projects its knowledge and ability into society. Everything we see around us is the projection of our education: is the projection of our culture, creativity, entrepreneurial skills, knowledge and organization of our values. The techno-energy-economic-cultural-educational development is the distributed software on which is based the ecosystem of a developed society as well as of a different balance between citizens and power (Envine, 2008; Sobel, Wall, 2009).

3. Commitment as orientation

Essential to this task of engaging and transforming social structures is the ability to critically voice one's own dissent as well as align actions accordingly. Dissent is fundamentally a creative process because it recognizes that existing ways of conceptualizing or stratifying society are themselves construction that can and should be reinvented. Dissent is a vehicle through which is possible to challenge the *status quo*, especially when a particular situation is oppressive, discriminatory, corrupted and requires solution that better meet the needs of both individuals and communities. This understanding of criticism calls to be engaged as scholars, as teachers, as students, as citizens. When individuals comprehend the ways in which communication works, they are better able to empower themselves as change agents. (Jenlink, 2009; Lacey, 2008).

Today on the possibility of a common European social policy, many might be the pedagogical questions about how to act rightly, about innovative action, both at the individual and at the communal level, in particular in several newly complex ethical situations within a cosmopolitan frame. One central consideration in ethical reflections today – both in Europe and elsewhere – is the specific nature of social factors such as: ignorance of the law and procedure, apathy or social tolerance ("everybody is doing it

anyway”), bureaucratic red tape, discretionary powers, lack of information available to the public. To tackle such a subject can contribute the proposal of a fresh educational commitment able to allow every human being to understand both the perils and the opportunities connected to globalization, this emerging “international” reality which claims a profoundly deep public conscience (and firstly a moral one), together with the respect of both personal and collective rights. The prospect of a more and more multiethnic society, the development of newer and newer information tools, the need of a constant orientation, an ever changing man-environment relationship and the need to regulate such relationship through education and training require a redefinition of the concept of future, with a view to the new cultural models as well as to the crucial issues of economic needs, marginality, disability, deviation. Such educative trend cannot be placed anywhere but in a planetary dimension of sustainability, since it can be solved only through the richness of a common work of intelligences. According to this perspective, to embody citizenship and not subjection of a more and more internationalized society, everyone must be endowed with capabilities to negotiate and attitudes to relate not only to one’s own country but to the entire world, and consequently even to the cultures a society might come to get in contact with. Therefore, the necessity to direct a renewed and specific attention to the cultural debate on education so to give to the younger generation the possibility of “getting excited” over their future.

The philosopher Charles Taylor observes that one of the most pressing task today – a sort of “modern predicament” – is coming to a renewed understanding of modernity, of what are the “momentous transformations of our culture and society over the last three or four centuries” (Taylor, 1989, ix). He also underlines that one central way of shouldering this task is to describe the elements and the history of what he calls the modern identity, that is the «ensemble of complex understandings of what it is to be a human agent: the senses of inwardness, freedom, individuality, and being embedded in nature which are at home in the modern West» (*Ibidem*). This statement reaffirms the importance of identity that each individual assumes: not only the capacity to shape what one does in life, but also to shape how and to what extent one can understand the own and other physical environment. Hence the importance that Dewey’s thought attributed to education – the whole philosophy can be interpreted as a general theory of education – seen as a social function to affirm the identity, that on the ground of human history and its expectations, can be conceived and

designed in socio-political programs that extend from totalitarianism to democracy. Following Dewey's analysis, the relationship maintained with the own environment, especially the social environment, shows or hides the benefit or lack of what is controlled by increasing or re-examining one's own priorities as complete individual (Hickman, 2009).

In the globalized world, competition is not just about products but, above all, about knowledge, which implies to maximize the human resources, i.e. to enhance their thinking and therefore their merits. This is not just an ethical issue towards individuals, but a political action towards the community, because when the notion of merit moves from the individual level to the collective level, it inflects its value also on the economical level. To pursue quality, to make responsible, to anticipate these are some of the mechanisms through which education could be a social accelerator for its capacity to resist processes that tend to compress the inner life, for its ability to spread awareness, to fertilize crosswise politics, economics, information. Pedagogy and pedagogical can reveal their indispensability as hard work of relational thinking in the perspective of a farsighted socio-historical vision – that today is dramatically lacking to our politics – as activation of a “system” of intelligence that preserves the extraordinary achievement of the human species: the discriminating thinking.

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RI-PENSARE LA PEDAGOGIA, RI-PENSARE L'EDUCAZIONE

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