

THE ROLE OF THE ITALIAN SCHOOL IN THE LIGHT OF NEW SOCIAL AND MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT.

(Intercultural relations are relations between different cultures: it is necessary that these cultures recognise each other as well as being recognised individually for their differences)

...The concepts of culture and ethnicity are difficult to define. In cultural studies and cultural anthropology ethnicity is determined as the classification of humans into groups based on a large range of criteria: language spoken; cultural identity; physical traits, etc. Cultural anthropologists, considering ethnicity and the people within these ethnic groups, have only the capacity to define or imagine the specific social space of these groups. However, anthropologists try to highlight that the idea of defining ethnicity can only be used as a means of surveying a population and can not define reality. Ethnicity is a symbolic form, a category of relations composed of reciprocal representatives and moral rules.

...Young people living abroad are open to the acquisition of a new identity within the society and country in which they live, yet, at the same time preserving their original cultures and transferring them to their new home country. In some cases we even witness the socialisation of people in anticipation of social integration into a new country. This is the process through which, those who intend on emigrating assume their intended destination country's values and orientations, thus preparing themselves in advance for integration into the new society. (This is possible principally thanks to the media).

...Foreigners, having moved to another country, tend to hold on to the culture and identity of their parents and reduce to a minimum their contact with the new society in that country. Due to this, they somewhat separate themselves and often live in a specific zone. According to several intellectuals, critics of western society and of the processes creating a common culture, cultural resistance should represent precise political, social and educative objectives so as to reinforce foreigners' original identities, thus permitting children to develop a good self esteem, which, is the only way of guaranteeing successful integration into today's multicultural society.

In Italy, for ten years the assimilation of other cultures has been the main objective of migratory policy. Today, the idea of assimilating immigrants into society is redundant. This has significant consequences on minorities, particularly second generation migrants who want to be integrated into the society of their country of destination, (even if this means losing their individual origins). However, the receiving countries, despite having promised integration to immigrants, are in fact still only contemplating this integration.

Marginality is the most frequent problem facing foreigners: people on the outside or fringes of society, be it in their country of origin or their new country of residence, people who are incapable to adapt their identities in order to successfully integrate themselves into society.

School is a societal institution which imposes the task of developing knowledge and to aid social and critical integration in the intelligence based culture of today's society.

People discuss about the extent to which the school system can contribute to the education of society, considering the sense and relevance of this education in a period of uncertainty, characterised by profound cultural mutations due to globalisation and multicultural society.

The school system has assumed a large and central role within society, a society in continual and rapid evolution. Under the influence of globalisation and in an increasingly multicultural society, this system has been forced to critically reassess its role in order to be ready to deal with the transformations of society and to be able to change its principal roles of protection and the diffusion of values and knowledge about different cultures.

Everyone has their own specific culture which, through/thanks to the phenomenon of globalisation and the increasingly multicultural society, are likely to facilitate social relations between humans on this planet. With respect to these different cultural identities, people are thrown into coexistence with other cultures and are forced to appreciate the differences and interact with one another.

It is necessary therefore, that the school system develops the capacity to reorganise and re-establish itself as an educational agency, open to intercultural relations and knowing how to deal with globalisation and to live peacefully in a society characterised principally by uncontrollable knowledge and an overall uncertainty and excessive simplicity.

The most important contribution from which the 20th Century has benefited, has in fact been the discovery of the limits of knowledge itself.

From the beginning of European documentation, various authors including the poet Saloh Stètiè and the pedagogue Edgar Morin have written several times that in life there is no certainty, and that the only thing which is certain in this world of uncertainties can only be distinguished through interrogation. With knowledge comes certainty, however in this world we are still lost in an ocean of uncertainty.

If on one hand the school system is called upon: to teach welcome and respect diversity, to recognise others and their specific cultural identities, to promote speech comprehension and collaboration on a large scale; to prevent violence, and overall to mutually enrich itself in learning about these other cultures. On the other, it is required to adapt itself to the current social situation using new teaching methods, to provide a sustained level of learning guidance that should be put in place to affront and know how to manage the uncertain, complexities and the unexpected.

O.E.C.E recognises that in fact it is the school system which is responsible for forming the future generation of citizens so that they live useful and satisfactory lives in an intricate environment in constant evolution.

Facing the force of the want to create a cognitive order (theoretical) and consequently a system which recognises this (practice), every individual must be informed of the existence of chaos and disorder however marginal. But many should not see this a something negative, the knowledge of living with a certain uncertainty should be the stimulus for the growth in intelligence of tomorrow's generation. With respect to teaching people to expect the unexpected, it induces the mentality of enlarging the horizons and diversifying the ways of thinking. Proposing to offer new educational perspectives, to get itself used to accepting complexity, diversity, the incomplete that characterise, nevertheless, today's society of knowledge.

The European Council discussed the Memorandum of instruction and permanent education in Lisbon in 2000. This underlined the indisputable entrance of Europe in to an era of knowledge and specified that the learning styles, life and work should be subject to a rapid transformation with the objective of creating a 'Europe of valued citizens' for employment, training and continual education. At the end of 2000, the Ministries of Education in 31 European countries had for the

most part adopted the section of the Copenhagen Agreement on the promotion of development on the principle of “continual teaching throughout life”.

Already since the 1990’s, compared to other European Union Member States, Italy has organised itself to the search for a balance in education levels that should be based on the efficiency and the effectiveness of learning, coming from a series of Governmental innovations always taking into consideration the basic principles of assistance and solidarity.

The DPR-275/99 makes evident the definitive goal of the National School System, speaking in fact of the “guarantee of the freedom of education and cultural pluralism in order to develop us as humans”. In anticipating how much this law 53/2003, law concerning training and professional qualifications, preferring the increase and the valorisation of the human being with respect to the differences and the identity of each and every individual.

In this age of uncertainty, but also in our society of knowledge and complexity, everything interlinks and is related in our globalised, multidimensional and multicultural society which has certainly contributed to making life more complex, but at the same time making school life more fascinating.

The test of globalisation is in fact at the same time a test of complexity: and it is for this reason that school is called upon to “orientate itself and its interlocutors” in a new way of schooling taken from the idea of “rediscovery and repossession of oneself”, but overall to reconsider the relationship between teaching and learning.

Today the student is at the centre of educational activity and teaching should become “personalised”: every teacher should in fact use all possible methods to encourage in every one of their students an individual cognitive style, their ‘way of learning’ to drive them to educational success, at the same time they should always promote diverse knowledge waves to develop the curiosity of the students, to encourage and motivate them to “learn to learn”. This can become possible using strategies such as: research-discovery action, group work, problem solving, cooperative learning, offering a variety of learning situations that induce the students to choose, decide, confront and express their own point of view, to respect others and to recognise diversity in themselves.

Today, schools have the task of ‘forming’ the students, to help them become intelligent future citizens and to instruct them on how to insert themselves into whatever social situation they might face in life. However school must promote constructive knowledge that involves means of integrating, developing, and correcting students, whilst at the same time encouraging the sharing of teacher’s ideas in order that the learning process is not only passive rote learning but more interactive and participation based. An understanding of how to help the students to contextualise the new knowledge and to know how to transfer it to various contexts throughout life.

As Edgar Morin maintains, “The development of attitudes towards contextual and global knowledge is becoming increasingly imperative to education.” and this produces the emergence of the ‘ecological’ mentality that “situates every event, information or piece of knowledge in a inseparable relationship with its environment, be it in cultural, social, economical, political or natural terms.

This must stimulate maturity facilitating “learning to learn”, which is concentrated on management of personal processes of learning throughout life, as a way of consciously reacting to complexity.

Therefore the school system is called upon to select, both in terms of quantity and quality, essential knowledge and to celebrate the ideas and the tastes of every teacher, making them freer to think open mindly as well as taking into consideration the essentials. In the words of Mointagne, “to cultivate the intelligence with a brain well developed as opposed to a head full of nothing”.

Overall, one can teach people to live and to become a citizen: school doesn't only help students to learn about discipline and ability, but develops and consolidates the fundamental aspects of the personality, in particular the basic means of communication. The generally high capacity to be on a cognitive level and on the level of moral development and loving and social relationships.

Today, school is required to teach “life skills” to the teachers, that is to say that these are necessary attributes to enable everyone to work effectively on the same level in society, to create interpersonal relations, to make choices and to resolve conflicts.

In this way school can contribute to giving a sense and signification to education, focusing on the acquisition of skills such as: critical thinking, creative thinking, demonstrating cognitive flexibility and therefore the capacity to doubt ones own convictions, to be open to the opinions of others, and conflicts with others. To know how to confront and resolve problems (problem solving), to have the capacity to communicate in an effective way, to know how to deal with ones own emotions and share those emotions with other, etc...

The School System can therefore contribute to the sense and meaning of education, but the first of all this system and the professionals who work within it must take up the role of co-responsibility, shared with the parents and, environment, dependant on the territory, to transmit cultures, values and knowledge but overall to form the human being. The next generation and children of generations to come must be helped through their education to become intelligent citizens, prepared for insertion in to a society characterised by uncertainty, complexity and clear, profound cultural changes. In an era of globalisation and increasing multicultural society, to be able to live happily, as free citizens, autonomous and responsible, knowing that they have acquired, as Durkehein suggests “a profound interior balance, a sort of polarity between the spirit that orientates them in a definitive direction, not only during childhood but for all for their long and magnificent lives”.

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