

# THE CONTRIBUTION OF NEO-PERSONALISTIC PEDAGOGY IN THE DEBATE ON SOCIAL CHANGE AND EDUCATION TO POLITICS

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**Abstract:** *The analysis of social dynamics from a pedagogical point of view tries to recognize the existence of opportunity and limits in relation to educational processes. The pedagogical point of view considering especially the neo-personalistic theoretical approach is interested in emphasising every aspect of social dynamic changes: individual, physical, cognitive, emotional, ethic, socio-political. For these reasons this present pedagogical research, utilizing both critical and empirical methods, concerns a very large range of topics in formal, informal and non-formal contexts.*

**Keywords:** *education, politics, neo-personalistic pedagogy, participation, research.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The analysis of social dynamics from a pedagogical point of view takes into consideration the existence of opportunities and limits in relation to the educational processes. The pedagogical point of view and the neo-personalistic approach (L. Santelli Beccegato, 1998) in particular, emphasize every aspect of social dynamic's changes from the following perspectives: individual, physical, cognitive, emotional, ethical, political, social. The neo-personalistic approach stems from and develops further the concept of the personalistic pedagogy theory. It does this by maintaining the focus on the person and, at the same time, it enriches the interpretation with a thorough analysis of the historical and social context and of the cultural and environmental conditions in which the person is placed. The connection is with the socio-constructivism and the phenomenological perspective. This educational development considers the individual's existence in its entirety. For these reason, this present pedagogical approach uses both critical and empirical research methodologies and includes (Alessandrini, 1988) a large range of informal and formal contexts and

situations. Educational issues (Blezza, 2007) occupy an important part in the public and private debate in the world. However, this is not reflected in the *quality* of the arguments proposed which often remain generic. There is an urgent need for substantial, significant and balanced pedagogical proposals alongside practical educational approaches that can assist the persons involved in its delivery. There are many books, articles and essays concerning education that highlight certain arguments of great importance. But if the style is frequently recognizable, the same cannot be said of the *sense* of writing as a specific mode of perception and processing of reality in a pedagogical perspective. They often do not recognize the problem of the speaking centers, ranging from merely socio-economic, psychological assumptions to philosophical elaborations or political or religious choices. To overcome this situation we need to strengthen our culture in trying to find the necessary orientations to clarify reality. The work of many researchers in Italy (such as P. Bertolini, 2003; M. Corsi, 2003; V. Iori, 2006; L. Pati, 2006) steers towards this approach using a wide variety of methods: from a theoretical and critical perspective to an empirical outlook. The Italian educational

tradition uses primarily the critical and theoretical method, and it is only recently that the empirical and experimental approach has been diffusely recognised as a conducive method for innovative outcomes. In these perspectives the relevant apport of the neo-personalistic approach is recognizable particularly in *social education* and in a *education to politic* engaged to elaborate and to develop basic skills within the complexity of contemporary society. The above mentioned contributions focusing on: the education of “nonviolence” (G. Falcicchio, 2009); youth and the dynamics of communication (V. Rossini, 2007; A. Cassano, 2013; A. Fornasari, 2013); women and equal opportunities (L. Carrera, 2013) are all representative of this work in progress. Responsibility, participation and solidarity are specific characteristics of this approach. Above all, solidarity is at the centre of all analysis, projects and proposals of the neo-personalistic pedagogy.

## **2. SOLIDARITY TOWARDS WHO AND TOWARDS WHAT?**

The economic downturn has fuelled and continues to fuel defeatist attitudes. The lack of opportunities reduce, if not cancel completely, the hope to make choices and improve life standards. The economical debate seems to dominate while the political response remains weak or inexistent. The economic divide has become wider in the last decade and it is even more alarming to recognise how our society is facing a moral crisis and that the simple rules of mutual respect and civil coexistence are failing. However, under the shadow of these recent developments, pedagogy has been committed to highlighting examples of solidarity behaviour and analysing its motivations. There are three qualifying conditions that can be identified. The first one is “information”. Being informed on the complexities of the human and natural world and on the risks that the everyone/everything faces in regard to our natural predatory behaviour towards each other (human and non human) create the ground for serious reflection. It is not a matter of holding technical data as evidence, but rather acquiring

consciousness of the fundamental rules that would allow us to continue to live in this world. The second key argument is the “equilibrium between resources and availability”. This equilibrium must be maintained not by escaping in a utopian and imaginary world where everyone lives in harmony with an uncontaminated nature but by thoroughly and serenely analysing everyone’s rights and obligations that need to be accepted without confusion. The third argument summarises all the cognitive, social, emotional and ethical aspects. That is the “sense of empathy” that everyone can learn how to feel and nurture, taken that the adequate stimulation is given. From these arguments we can reach the awareness of the negative consequences and risks that derive from selfish and self-centred behaviours as well as apathetic attitude towards politics, as P. Bertolini’s research proves (2003). From here comes the necessity and the urgency to support and value educational obligations from a private and public, ethical and social perspective in order to counter any regressive and anti-social process. It is important to highlight how a sympathetic attitude is not only meant to be for human beings but also in regard to nature (P. Malavasi, 2011). Predatory behaviours throughout history (during the modern and contemporary age in particular) have brought to the realisation that without an educational framework “nature would have probably taken a huge risk in creating the human being”. We need to understand that the human being can only live with and in nature, and not against it. Survival is guaranteed by the supportive relations towards each other and nature in a framework of co-existence (F. Capra, 2002). The important thing is to avoid generalisation and not limit yourself to generic formulations and requirements, but to direct our attention to well-grounded initiatives and choices (S. Marchetti, 2006; G. Calvano, 2011).

## **3. RESPONSIBILITION PROCESSES AND POLITIC PARTICIPATION**

Our recent and distant history highlights with clarity the importance of investing in

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education that represents the knowledge of the past and the planning of the present and the future: working towards the common good becomes the driving and binding principle. Processes of responsibility and social participation intertwine with an education to politic unfortunately very feeble in our Country.

The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.

These are the observations not of a pedagogue, but of a great writer (I. Calvino 1972). We need to emphasize the experiences of solidarity that have been brought forward in different ways and from different fronts. Approximately 10% of the Italian population, more than 5 million, has had voluntary experience and this participation is growing (as recorded by ISTAT). The significant outcome is that this choice of voluntary participation not only helps others, but also helps ourselves. Various personal testimonies allow us to collect stories of people that, without any significant personal, economical or cultural wealth, have been able to give much and by doing this, have significantly enriched their own existence overcoming times of loneliness and trouble through their voluntary work (L. Pati, 2006; 2008) The aim is to understand that we have the need of one another at different times and in different ways for different reasons but that these ultimately converge into one ultimate truth that is our nature and its being fundamentally social. It is of course necessary to recognise repetitive and superficial proclamations and distance ourselves from the *false* solidarity that we often find in the political debate, where politicians commonly use the first person

plural while debating dramatic issues of our times, such as conflicts and unemployment. “We are in difficult circumstances....”. It is the verb “we are” that covers as an illusory humanism that is also a false solidarity. And it is against that hypocrisy that pedagogy and educational work confront in all its forms with the objective of understanding with truth and authenticity the state of things and sensibly and with intelligence advance forward. A renewed and serious political commitment must follow in this direction: it should not spin reality to win political points, but should instead advert potential problems and shoulder responsibility in finding shared solutions. Politics means following the common good, not self interest. This obvious founding principle has been around for more than 2500 years but it is clearly not practised. Contemporary pedagogy continuously reminds us of this principle and strives to research the most efficient ways to practise it. Of course, many of us have reached with dismay the conclusion that the single individual does not have the possibility to speak out against the brutality of the “powers in play”. But it this scepticism and this defeatist attitude that will lead to a worsened situation. The pedagogical method in general, and political awareness in particular, strongly argue for the value of every single contribution underlining the importance of an in depth knowledge and motivated and inexhaustible participation. (G. Cotturri, 2013) It is necessary to maintain with clarity and passion our own commitment and achieve a sufficient control of our own personal reality and of the contextual social dynamics. This is without the pretext of wanting to be the creator of innovative and radical ideas but also without a pessimistic and defeatist attitude to a life that we believe is regulated by overreaching powers . When receiving his Noble prize in 1957, A Camus commented:

Each generation doubtless feels called upon to reform the world. Mine knows that it will not reform it, but its task is perhaps even greater. It consists in preventing the world from destroying itself.

It is a message we can make our own. The concept of the “enlarged solidarity” (Jonas, 2002) that extends not only to those close but also to those far in time and space, not only to human beings but also to nature, will help us to achieve this task. Today within the nation states the public institutions trudge along. In the eyes of the public, the political parties serve no purpose<sup>1</sup>. Will we emerge from this crisis different or better than we are today? The answer could be positive if we only are capable of investing in education, valuing the necessity of an awareness of politics as a sign of involvement and active participation to answer to the current crisis (not only economic, but cultural and ethical). The social energies are feeling themselves to find an answer to the problems. Awareness is growing in regards to the fact that the serious economic divide and the impoverishment of a large part of society are precursors of dangerous social tensions that, at the end of the day, involve us all. Pedagogy tends to identify, introduce and support interventions that improve our situation and are respectful of time frameworks, contexts, and individual motivations. It allows every individual to be “the answer that ignites life”. (M. Zambrano, 2008). On this principle, pedagogy crosses with politics in its highest and truest sense. This leads us to consider with intense scrutiny the hierarchy of our needs and desires, and evaluate the profound and real reasons behind our choices. To distinguish with responsibility what is superficial and what is necessary and to realise what answers to the common good and the public and private interest, is at the foundation of the political and pedagogical method (when they both validly follow their specific objective). Along this path, many

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<sup>1</sup>G. Acone concisely and with foresight observes how difficult it is to escape from the complexity of reality. “Reality far from bringing us to a sort of defeat and indifference in respect of a higher escape of youth from social commitment, sheds light instead on the fascination of the challenge and the wager. Challenge and wager re-propose the education as a growing humanization of the human being in a planetarian horizon”. See *Necessità di una specificità storica*, in AA.VV., *L'educazione etico-politica*, XXII Convegno di Scholé. Brescia: La Scuola, 1984, p. 70.

issues arise. The biggest dangers emerge, as it has been described in many researches, from living superficially, distracted by continuous and various contrasting messages in which we are immersed and from living disorderly with ephemeral and banal choices. However, the real danger is the loss of everyday customs that surround us, where there is no more space for hope, where demotivation grows and the vital energy extinguishes. It is necessary to know how to face with courage (also overcoming difficult challenges) the reality of things, studying them and re-elaborating them searching for new and shared solutions. A way to begin this path is to acquire a profound awareness of the wide-spread fragilities, weaknesses and failings and in this way avoid abuse. To be able to recognise your own weaknesses; to develop the awareness that we all need each other and that we all require help and “a kind ear”, is probably the best way to renew every day our mutual assistance and enrich our solidarity. The concluding message is trying to understand, to follow an interpretational viewpoint, and to value the contents and the forms that underline our common search rather than authoritatively express our judgement on matters with prejudice. The interpretation develops the meaning of things helping to find what unites us. A knowledge that is nourished by co-habitative living is able to open new scenarios. Involving ourselves in these matters, with the intent to improve our condition, is the great challenge that together we should never tire to face.

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## THE CONTRIBUTION OF NEO-PERSONALISTIC PEDAGOGY IN THE DEBATE ON SOCIAL CHANGE AND EDUCATION TO POLITICS

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