

INTERCULTURAL SKILLS AND SOCIALIZATION OF THE SUBJECT

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Abstract: *The starting point is the question asked by Touraine, “Can we live together?”, that is, will we be able to combine the subject’s personal freedom, the acknowledgement of diversities and the institutional guarantees protecting both freedom and diversity? In order to find an answer concerning the possibility of such life together, the article will mainly examine the arguments put forward by Edgar Morin and Alain Touraine, but without disregarding other scholars’ opinions. Globalization and communication may be seen as two labels. The first refers to the current and future state of the world; the second is applied to means and tools of sociability and sociableness. These steps make it possible to check the inextricable and reciprocally functional co-presence of permanence and change, as well as continuity and discontinuity. These four elements are all the more important if we think that global displacements of people are both permanent and transitory, and therefore extremely varied in nature. In order to give an answer to the question asked at the beginning, after discussing the suggestions aimed at constructing an “*école du sujet*”, it will be possible to say what possibilities exist to achieve a new society, reconciled by the possible dialogue between cultures that are in reciprocal contact; and such contact is not only short-lived, it must necessarily imply peaceful coexistence on the same territory.*

Keywords: *intercultural skills; globalization and communication; global displacements; freedom and diversity; école du sujet.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Every social group possesses special skills for its own culture because that culture develops and lives within a specific social group that does not necessarily correspond to a State, an entire region or a city. Society is in fact always heterogeneous, as it consists of persons of different genders and generations, who present a high number of diversities. Other characteristics are added to the two biological ones, such as education and profession, thus shaping what is called the “social extraction”. Modern institutions – for example school as a compulsory requirement – have partially mitigated social inequalities and diversities in modern states, albeit with very dissimilar school systems. However, diversities remain and ever more become a reason for discrimination due to the fragmentation and individualization of society itself. Another type of inequality comes into being because of the social mobility inherent in the post-modern society, which is linked to geographical displacements motivated not only by the search for better life conditions, but also by the fact that the country of origin is at war.

Immigration, which during the last two decades has taken the guise of clandestinity and precariousness of arrivals, entails many difficulties for those who migrate as well as for the countries of destination. To enact social order, adjustments need to be produced and shared and particular situations interpreted for the application of those adjustments. Action based on a notion of practice, and not on one of choice or behaviour, falls within the theory of social space and the theory of power, that is, of the management of resources, of economic and social, cultural and symbolic capital (Tessarolo, 2015). Still, if relations are viewed as “oxygen” and a pre-condition for the interpersonal relation, there is another side to the coin: relations are a source of well-being, but often a source of serious problems as well (Bellini, 2015: 53). In a society in which roles are voided of meaning and the separation between them and what is human becomes less relevant, the request for acknowledgement is also void and useless; besides, where an aspiration to reciprocal acknowledgement seems impossible to be fulfilled, individuals find themselves trapped into forms of self-recognition that are increasingly solipsistic (Bellini, 2015: 55).

2. BASES OF INTERCULTURALITY

2.1 The basis. To try to be in tune with the other, what matters is to find something to say to each other, to look for a place where we may be “interlocutors”. The issue may be analyzed from different perspectives: bearing in mind our “education”, which starts with deuterio-learning, in Bateson’s terms, and our *habitus*, in Bourdieu’s terms. Both these observations fall within primary socialization, that is the part of our life during which we spend our time “doing”, in small circles where we acquire socially shared knowledge through embodied practices. We need to find a meeting point in order to understand each other and be reciprocally interesting. Each individual’s frame of reference consists of intersubjective experiences guaranteeing the foundation and the maintaining of the world of daily life, meaning “the world where we live intuitively together with its real entities” (Husserl, 1970:156).

In studying migrations, sociology highlights what Merton in 1956 attributed to reference groups, i.e. the fact that those who migrate to a specific country bear in their mind a model called “anticipatory socialization”, explaining how the integration of a migrant person into an industrial society may take place. This kind of socialization will be accordingly more difficult if the difference between the culture of origin and culture of destination is greater (Pollini and Scidà, 2002).

Learning also forms part of social order, which tends to change the very moment it is achieved. Chaos hides under the fragile appearance of social order and its rules are so mysterious that it continually poses questions on how it can be possible. According to Bateson (1972) there is first-degree learning (*proto-learning*), which can be experienced directly (provided by school education), protocolled and planned, and second-degree learning (*deuterio-learning*), through which individuals learn to place the stress on events in a specific way, thus transforming meaningful episodes into sequences. The first two steps of the teaching process are somewhat in line with man’s nature and can be found in every culture. Studying and teaching are the processes on which the transmission of knowledge is based. Deuterio-learning gives pre-eminence to the social context in the learning and teaching process, to how skills and knowledge are passed, with greater weight attributed to the context as compared with the transmitted content. This type of learning is called “from mother to daughter” by Margaret Mead (learning by doing) (1972).

The psychological study that can be assimilated to “learning to learn”, which considers the relationships between Gestalt, learning, habit, experience of the flow of events, has shown that deuterio-learning is achieved through the progressive variation of the rate of proto-learning. Bateson asks himself what a series of similar experiments is (1972:205-206). Beyond mechanical learning, it is difficult to establish the meaning of a learning context similar to another. In human education, habits are often acquired in the most diverse ways. Alongside external events, the context also includes the behaviour of an individual, which is regulated by prior learning and will be such as to shape the global context until it adapts to the desired segmentation. Deuterio-learning is characterized by self-validation, and this makes it almost impossible to remove. In addition, as it is acquired in childhood, it will very likely persist throughout the life span and many important characteristics of an adult’s segmentation must be expected to have their roots in early childhood.

As regards the fact that these segmentations are unconscious, it has to be said that the unconscious includes not only repressed material but also most of the processes and habits of perception of Gestalt. We are subjectively aware of our dependence, but we cannot clearly say how these structures have been constructed or what inspired us to adjust it (Bateson, 1972: 329).

Bourdieu as well examines how we can learn to live together. Every subject acquires a *habitus* that is the effect of a specific individual being existentially exposed to a set of social conditionings and conditions. Structures of the social world that become principles of vision and division that allow the world to be classified are thus internalized as mental structures, starting already in early childhood. The *habitus* is generally shared with those who have similar social conditioning. In this way, an exceptional ability becomes rooted in each of us to act as if a rule was in place even when it is not, and do what the world expects from us even if we have not made the conscious choice of doing what we do. This practical action governed by the *habitus* may constitute the basis of tailored strategies that turn out to be better suited to a given situation, strategies capable of optimizing performance and effects (Santoro, 2009: XI).

Even if the subjects know the rules, their actions go beyond the rules themselves because what they try to do is not simply abide by the rules, but enact a strategic adjustment to circumstances. What constrains an individual are the social

structures, which operate from within subjectivity as mental structures, that is, as cognitive patterns based on the sense of limit possessed by each individual regarding his/her real possibilities in a given social context. This is the embodiment of cognitive structures, an actual means of practical knowledge. The state, market and school present themselves as institutions working for the common good, but then all they do is sanction, produce and reproduce social inequalities. They present themselves as agents of freedom but work as organizations of power.

2.2 Theories of learning. Among the scholars we regard as important in forming the bases of a new kind of learning models, we will briefly mention Dewey, Bruner, Morin and Touraine. Bateson and Bourdieu have shown that in the encounter between subjects who belong to the same culture or to different cultures, the interlocutors, if adult, have already internalized their “being in the world”: they know how to behave in order to adjust to their own culture (deutero-learning), they already possess a *habitus*. Proto-learning, that is, school teaching, must be summoned for the migrating and non-migrating individual. It should be underlined that modern theories on learning and education show the practical importance of going toward the other, and that full humanity may not be achieved through an abstraction of humanity itself.

Dewey puts experience at the basis of education, in other words: practical action developed by the subject in his/her interaction with the environment and with other subjects comprises all actions of daily life, thus absorbing the relations between experiencing organism and experienced reality. The “active school” idea is an approach that may be explained by the phrase “learning by doing”, teaching that is not passively received through mnemonic notions, but rather results from the student’s voluntary activity.

Bruner starts from the idea of “agency” (ability for action), which entails gaining greater control over one’s mental activity and reflexion to give sense to what is learned and understand it. Collaboration and the sharing of resources among the parties involved in teaching and learning therefore becomes necessary.

Morin sees the involvement of humanistic and scientific knowledge as an authentic reform of teaching and education, the crucial element for achieving the best results. The motto he refers to is inspired by Montaigne: “a well made head is better than a well filled head”, a correct approach to knowledge is better than possessing countless

notions, one separated from the other. The accumulation of knowledge is not important; what matters most is having knowledge and organizing principles at the same time, since the latter allow one to connect notions and give them meaning. According to Morin, education must stimulate the general attitude of the mind to pose problems and solve them by stimulating the use of general intelligence.

Touraine notes that each society may be recognized thanks to the systems available to it and that diversities also occur within the same social group; diversity will obviously be greater among different social groups.

Educational systems reflect the spirit of a given society; the serious problems determined by both underrating the relevance of the school system as the basis for democratic thinking, and overrating a “parallel school” that may be identified in television media and social networks, are often not given the importance they deserve. School appears to have found it difficult, for several decades now, to accept itself as an acknowledged agent of education, connected to the duty of educating, and to feel subjected to the “predominance” of a youth culture of a technological kind, causing uneasiness in teachers who feel hardly adequate, and often extraneous, to fight for the cause of contemporary education. Not only educational tools have changed, but also students, as all over Europe now they belong to a proletariat of mainly foreign origin.

A problem on which Touraine reflects is what kind of education can help us solve the effects of democratization. He sees the possibility for individuals to be subjects responsible for their own existence. Up to now, school has provided an education centred upon society and its values, and not on the individual. In school, the subject of classical modernity would learn to put him/herself at the service of progress, of the nation and of knowledge. The school of the Subject, instead, is oriented to personal freedom, interpersonal communication and democratic management of society. School should be oriented so as to provide an education directed toward demand, and not toward offer as it has been so far. If it is to become a “school of the subject”, it cannot limit itself to imposing rules and norms on students and delegating to teachers powers whose limit is established by political power.

School must acknowledge individual and collective demands: a pupil entering school is not a *tabula rasa* and the teaching must no longer prolong the old separation between private and public sphere (Touraine, 1998). Furthermore, this

new school should move from an education centred on the culture and values of the educating society to an education that attaches importance to (historical and cultural) diversity and to the acknowledgement of the other, to communication between boys and girls, between different ages, an intercultural communication – thus allowing for the dialogic dimension of contemporary culture. Recognition of the other is solely possible starting from the affirmation of each person's individual right to be a subject. It is almost obvious that the subject can not affirm him/herself without becoming free from the fear of the other, and therefore from the other's exclusion, and not recognition (Taylor, 1998).

School must accept heterogeneity, multiculturalism, and this is indispensable in the present world where recognition of the other is inseparable from the awareness of being a free Subject with a will to correct inequalities of conditions and opportunities, since the classical model giving the first place to the abstract notion of equality – similar to citizenship – constituted a social hierarchy based on merit rather than on birth. The new model starts from the acknowledgement of inequalities to try to correct them. Characteristic of such a conception of education is not only the fact that it belongs to a democratic society, but also that it grants an active role of democratization to the schooling system, taking upon itself the specific conditions in which different students have to deal with the same tools and the same problems (Touraine, 1998:288). One of the main problems is connected with the prior education of subjects who arrive as teenagers and young adults, having therefore already acquired a *habitus* and gone through their deuterio-learning. It is difficult to deal with both of these; it becomes necessary to understand that they exist and that they are different and personalized, just as those of our nationals.

The educational policy that highlights democratic activity must take into account problems such as school failure or inadequate knowledge of the national language (spoken and written). It must be remembered that we live in a society of change and communication, but also of desocialization and isolation; that is why we need to strengthen each person's ability to actively live change (Touraine, 1998:289). This means everybody must participate in change so as not to increase social distances. School must not "get rid" of what constitutes an important part of the students' personality. The teaching of religions (with a historical and doctrinal view) does not jeopardize secularism. On the contrary, silence

imposed on religious realities undermines the objectivity to which the secular school refers (Touraine, 1998:291). Touraine's idea (1998) rests on taking distance from the model according to which school is an agency of socialization. School should now commit for the growth of the individual's ability to be a "Subject", since this is the only way in which they can become good citizens. As regards its purpose, school will be increasingly less tied to the transmission of knowledge, norms and conceptions, and it will be centred more on the use of instrumentality and on developing and expressing personality. The communication society offers teachers and students a guarantee of freedom by supporting the freedom and creativity of those it educates.

School must therefore teach students to decode any social language, from the language of town planning or administrative activity to that of scientific and technological research. Furthermore, it should be one of its tasks to teach reading the media, whose weakness and complexity consists in a tendency to decontextualize messages and re-contextualize¹ them in a space that does not belong to them. What needs to be insisted upon, though, is interpersonal communication. It comes as no surprise that cultures are different; what becomes necessary is to perceive the convergences and divergences between interpretations that people of different cultures give of the same documents and events.

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The reconstruction of self identity no longer occurs through identification with a global order of an economic, natural or religious kind, but through acknowledgement of the dissociation of elements that once constituted an integrated experience. A free society must be based on solidarity and, besides that, on the will to communicate. Communication implies making contact with the other, understanding his/her diversity and embracing the fact that every person is entitled to combine instrumentality and identity, reason and culture in his/her own way (Touraine, 1998: 154). In this way it is possible to contribute to recomposing a dissociated society, heir to the

¹"To decontextualize" means to remove an event from the context in which it took place, in order to be able to recontextualize it within another format, for example that of the news (Tessarolo, 2003).

separation between reason and affectivity. Acknowledging diversities means understanding the compatibility of different cultures, comprehending and affirming a universalistic principle of equality among human beings that is expressed in the particularity of acknowledging the “subject”.

3. CONCLUSIONS

We may therefore ask how living together is possible for people who do not share the same language and culture, and who live in the same land only because they are immigrants.² Such shared soil is also a reason for debate and incomprehension, because it is shared at a time of economic crisis causing local residents to view an immigrant as someone who “takes away” part of their wealth. What is the answer to the question of whether we can live together, equal and different? The answer is affirmative, but very complicated. The unity of a society may only be reconciled with the diversity of personalities and cultures by placing the idea of a personal “subject” at the core of our reflexion and our actions. The dream of subjecting all individuals to the same universal laws of reason, religion or history, has always transformed itself into a nightmare, an instrument of domination; but giving up any principle of unity and the acceptance of major differences also leads to segregation and civil war.

The choice that needs to be made is not between defending the past and accepting present “disorder”.³ New forms of life, both collective and personal, need to be conceived and constructed. In this phase of passage, we may ask ourselves if we are able to understand the world in which we live. In order to understand it, we need to work together despite our diversities and articulate the achievements of instrumental reason together with the ever more radical defence of personal and collective identities. Before belonging to society, a human being comes to the world as a subject holder of rights that are not derived from society; they are in fact original rights, that is, natural attributes of the human being. A lowest common denominator of mankind that should be acknowledged and protected consists in what a

man has in common with another man, and it should not be used to eliminate differences. Rights derived from society refer to the social contract stemming from the covenant established between free men, who by mutual consent limit their freedom to generate the State. It is not enough that the fundamental characteristics of a human being “exist”, in order to exist they need to be acknowledged (Tessarolo, 2013). Proposals for social change are always behind in comparison with all “philosophical” and rhetorical discourse on the same issue (Lesenciuc, 2012). The principle of secularism also needs to be foreseen. This is a concept entailing the weakest level of recognition of cultural diversity, as its logic consists in tolerating diversity of faiths and customs in the hope of a progressive assimilation of the entire population toward the universalism of reason and citizenship. When affirming his/her personal freedom, the subject moves in society together with other individuals who think like him/her: the individual affirmation has a chance to become a social movement. It is possible to transform an individual into a subject only by recognizing the other as a subject as well, who works in his/her way to join a cultural memory with an instrumental project, thus designing a multicultural society that is far from both the fragmentation of social life into diverse communities, and a mass society unified by a commercial logic rejecting cultural diversity (Touraine, 1998:24).

We have to learn to live together by developing our understanding of others, and of their history, traditions and spirituality. By doing so, we can create a new spirit which, thanks to our perception that we are increasingly dependent upon one another, can make a joint analysis of the dangers and challenges of the future, encourage the realization of joint projects or the intelligent and peaceful handling of the inevitable conflicts. (UNESCO, 1996:18).

Globalization and communication may be seen as two labels. The first refers to the current and future state of the world. These steps make it possible to check the inextricable and reciprocally functional co-presence of permanence and change, as well as continuity and discontinuity. These four elements are all the more important if we think that displacements of people of a global entity are both permanent and transitory, and therefore extremely varied in nature. Furthermore, they highlight hybrid identities that may give way to societies where the greatest possible number of subjects is able to put together, each time in a different way, what joins them, that is, the instrumental reality,

²We refer to this link: <http://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/media/discorso-re-norvegia-gay-rifugiati-siamo-tutti-norvegesi-7315b04d-e92e-49d5-a76c-94e419e53117.html# foto-1...> for the speech given by King Harald V of Norway on 1 September 2016, where interculturality is well expressed.

³More precisely, we may say with Boudon (2009) that “the place of disorder” needs to be found.

with what differentiates them, that is, the body and mind's life, their memory and projects.

If we consider the history of *Homo sapiens*, we cannot say the species was born human, but rather that it learned to be human. Maybe the network of knowledge and experience that is emerging with the progression of the planetary age may allow our species to learn to be global and to take advantage of the creative potential inherent in cultural diversity (Bocchi and Ceruti, 2004: 107). This is a hope we can transform into reality, provided we endeavour to consider others as ourselves and acknowledge their diversity.

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