

CONTEMPORARY INTERROGATIONS
IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

Meditating upon the relation between what there is and what there should be in a human perspective, remarking the climb of existence towards being as it is on an educational tract in the context of the contemporary society, I have identified a series of aspects which have to be re-thought. Considering that the axiological foundation of the society and, implicitly, of the education is affected as an expression of the lack of sense and of ideal, I have identified, on one side, some of the main tensions which feed this fact and I have proposed, on the other side, the type of paradigm which tries to offer the solution: the prospective paradigm. Its shaping and its supporting could have been achieved only by testing the necessary equilibrium between continuity and discontinuity, by pleading for a series of principles which should ground an efficient formation and by demonstrating that the only form of education which is beneficial in this respect is the one which becomes a means of obtaining freedom, conceived and achieved from the perspective of the uncertain, stormy future. From such a conceptual foundation one can build an answer which is more adequate to the numerous, current interrogations from the field of the philosophy of education.

* Paper presented at the World XXI Congress of Philosophy, Istanbul, 2003

The beginnings of eras have always exerted a mysterious attraction over human minds and souls, being associated with the overturn, the reshaping, the unknown and they usually generated fears. More than any other one, the beginning of this millenium. For over half a century, analysts of all categories have kept on warning that “civilization is in a crossroads” and “mankind in a turning point”, that we are on the edge of “the third wave”, or that we are crossing “the big transition”, advancing in the epoch of postmodernism (in some analysts’ opinion) or in the one of supra- or post- industrialism (in others’ opinion). The idea that from the “joint of history” we are heading to a “New Age” which is not enough prefigured but foreseeable, has been sustained. If to all these we add a multitude of apocalyptical prophecies and military scenarios, we have all the reasons to be convinced that we are crossing a world of anxiety, of absurdity, of dezorientation and devaluation where the “fear of future” is in the foreground, fear which floods the personal and social feelings. All these are an expression of the unprecedented rhythms of transformations.

The fundamental cause of this lack of poise is *the crisis of values, the lack of solid axiological reference points* which could offer the communities the support which is necessary for the efficient orientation in a world of rapid changes, of interdependences, and which could radically change the paradigm of interhuman relationships and could offer a new essence to the concept of responsibility. The crisis gets deeper as the educative systems not only that are incapable of adapting to the challenges of the contemporary world, but also their attempts in this respect are very modest, in front of the unpatient time.

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The contemporary crisis of education is one of the lack of sense, of the lack of ideal. The human project - not enough shaped – must be on the size of the future time which makes the education of the future look more like a search, an investigation, than a certainty or a model (9, p.21).

In the search of such a model, the exigencies which appear towards education amplify and modify the content. The answer to the question “how should education be achieved today for a difficult-to-foresee-tomorrow?” must be interceded by the conscientiousness of the *main tensions* which seem to feed the social existence of the beginning of the millenium (3, pp. 11-12).

- the tension between *global and local*: step by step, people are learning to become citizens of the planet, without losing their roots and keeping on playing an important role in the lives of their own nations and local communities;
- the tension between *universal and individual*: the globalization of culture is a continuous phenomenon which isn't finished yet. The disregard of the unique character of the human being is not a minor risk at all. Each individual has to choose his own future and to reach his higher potential within the framework of the traditions and culture, existences which must not be jeopardized by the progress of the contemporary world;
- the tension between *the short term reasons and the long term reasons*, in the circumstances of the expansion of the ephemeral, of the moment, in a world in which the abundance of information and of transitory emotions highlights permanently the immediate problems;

- the tension between *the need of competition*, on one side, and *the concern for the equality of chances*, on the other side, an attempt from which the reconceptualization of the permanent education has resulted;
- the tension between *the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human being's ability to assimilate and conceptualize it*, which may also be called human disparity;
- the tension between *material and spiritual*, the ontological break between what man is, as an expression of the objective determinations, and what he wants to be, as an expression of some values, ideals and models he aspires after.

The more serious signals received from the world of philosophy and science beginning with the 70's underline *the imperative of the change of the attitude of the humanity in relation to the becoming*. One of the basic conditions of the development becomes the living presence of the future (4, p.88) because "mankind can't afford to wait (anymore) for the changes to produce spontaneously and at random. *Man must initiate himself, in time, changes* of a necessary proportion, but bearable in order to avoid intolerable great changes generated from the exterior"(6, p.159). This way we penetrate the kernel of the *prospective conception* – respectively, a new way of understanding of the transformation, of the mechanisms of the becoming, of the relation between continuity and discontinuity.

History may also be interpreted as an endless process of generating problems and finding solutions for them. The approach to the socio-culturally moulded

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problems is generally achieved from the perspective of the traditions, of the solutions which are integrated in inherited patterns, of the values which are recognized and inculcated in the sense of the keeping of the given, of the conservation of the equilibrium of the status-quo, of the re-production. At the same time, we admit that man is not just a homeostatic being, but also he takes risks, he builds projects, he re-creates the world, being characterized by the metaphysical restlessness. That's how he comes to front problems or to generate some of them (which do not "fit" the given algorithms), producing another process of search or break, calling for creativity or for the determination of the new. The two ways of solving the problems - on the axis of continuity and on the one of discontinuity, respectively - must be understood in their dynamic, indestructible unity, by outrunning the absolute, artificial disjunction between them. The existence of man and of society, and mostly their progress, although they are distinct realities, can no longer be completely and correctly conceived unless they are looked at in the terms of *continuity in discontinuity, of continuity in change*.

Here's why we consider that if it were possible for us to re-found our whole educative effort we would start from the following *principles*, being consistent in the attempt to reconcile continuity with discontinuity:

- *back to the child*, as a fundamental value, bearer of future and potentially generator of material and spiritual values, of progress, capable of long lasting development;
- *forward to the future*, as a direction which focalizes all the efforts and energies, all the reserves and

hopes, the whole optimism and pragmatism of the pedagogues;

- ***back to the initial instruction of the pedagogues***, as a process which is responsible for the whole further development of the children and of the adults;
- ***forward to the reformation of the educative systems***, an authentic transformation, in concord with the profile of the contemporary society and with the perspective which is opened by the prospective paradigm;
- ***back to the values***, as a basis and essence of what the human side of the being is, and what it should be, as a reality which generates the gradual approach of existence to being.

Only in such an environment the prerequisites of the ensurance of the child's acces to culture appear, without affecting his freedom; in the same way ***a new understanding of education*** is generated, and it becomes a ***means of obtaining freedom*** (apud 8, p.127), or a way to free the thing that provides each man from being himself, offering him the possibility of fulfilling, of becoming somebody according to his singular way of existing in the world (1, p.140).

As we get close to the 90's we can observe that the studies which were destined to the transformation of education have amplified. In 1995, in a UNESCO document, it was noted the idea that "school is totally helpless in front of the formation of the competences and attitudes which are useful and adaptable to a changing world. Instead of preparing for autonomy and transformation, most of the times school develops passive and routine attitudes" (7). An

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year later, in The International Conference of Education from Geneva, they talked about the causes which require the essential transformation of education; they also considered future to be an element which was “associated with the unpredictable, with the uncertainty and discontinuity in the framework of the rapid mutations which the society is familiar with” (10, p.1). That’s why they proposed the idea that the countries from all over the world should critically re-evaluate their educative systems (ibidem, p.2).

The summary analysis of the anterior ideas together with the fresh look at the becoming emphasizes the fact that we are dealing with a *new global problem: the transformation of education from the perspective of the impact on future*. In the circumstances of a new understanding of the becoming, the idea of a new education having as a purpose the adaptation and *the promotion of education as means of knowledge, conception and building of the future* is necessary to be abandoned. The continuity of the transformation in an ample rhythm ascertains the permanent innovation in the field of education by emphasizing the future alternatives and the human ability to elaborate them. This is not given by the increasing of the ability to adapt, but by the development of the ability to anticipate the sense and the rhythm of the changes, of the ability to elaborate the possible future or to articulate the persistent values on the background of these transformations and, above all, by the development of the human by cultivating its humanity, its dignity and its responsibility.

Such a reconceptualization has as a basis *a new understanding of man*. This conception which we call “*from inside – to outside*” (2, p.30) demonstrates its efficiency by postulating that we must “begin with our own

persons, mainly with the most intimate levels of the ego – with the models, the character and personal motivations” (idem). Most of this conception’s principles – be proactive, start by having your mind focused at the end, give priority to the priorities, think only of winning, first try to understand and only after that to be understood, act synergically – prove to have tried to model in the terms of the future but also by keeping and increasing the persistent values. Such a manner of conceiving the human and the inter-human relationships seem to be the most suited for the establishment of an essential transformation of education. Essentially, we are talking about ***a double turn of education: from past to future, from outside to inside.*** For the first one to be possible, the second one is priorly necessary.

Going up from the concrete educative level to the one of amazements, which is specific to the philosophy of education, we can proceed to a systematization of the absolutely justified ***interrogations***, which are generated by the current socio-cultural context:

- from the ***ontological perspective***: What is education (anymore)? How is the essence of the processes of communication and learning understood (anymore)? What are the real relations of the child’s existence with his consciousness, with his ego, his intelligence (the forms of intelligence which were recently highlighted begin with the linguistic one and reach the emotional one), his personality, the process of its development, his creativity, its possibilities of stimulation and of becoming objective (anymore)? What is and what does the nature of the formative intervention consist of, in a society which is marked by en mass communication, by the

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interdependence of the formal channels with the nonformal and informal ones? How big can the impact of the educative intervention be in such a framework (anymore)? Which ones can become the forms and the contents of education (anymore)?

- from the *gnoseological perspective*: Whether the child is able to know essentially the realities which are to be learned (anymore)? What does the truth mean (anymore) in the knowledge which is profoundly affected by the moral wear? How much and in what way can the child be taught (anymore) to know, in an informatized society? In what measure do the truth and the error intermingle, generating perverse effects in an epoch which is marked by the mediatory revolution? To what degree can the child separate truth from false, essential from unessential, value from nonvalue in an hiperinformatized environment which lacks solid axiological criteria (anymore)?
- from the *axiological perspective*: Which is the meaning of the educative process (anymore)? In what measure can the pedagogical tradition, in the line of Platon, Rousseau, Kant or Dewey, be capitalized (anymore)? To what degree does the child represent the central value of the formative approach (anymore)? Which is the purpose of knowledge of a scholar type (anymore)? Which is the teacher's role in the school of the XXIth century (anymore)? Which are the sacred things in which he believes and which he inculcates the children with (anymore)? In what measure does the dignity of the pedagogue exist (anymore) and is respected? How

ample is the understanding of the teacher as a meaningful agent of the change? What can the value of truth, of good, of beautiful, of justice be (anymore) in a school / society which is marked by diversity, inequality, discrimination, intolerance, conflicts, consumerism, profit, sexuality, drugs, violence?

- from the *praxiological perspective*: How can the contemporary pedagogue act (anymore) and how must he act? Which are the methods, the means, the strategies and the technologies that can grant efficiency to the formative intervention? How can the pedagogue lead the child beneficially from the stage of dependence, through independence, to interdependence (anymore)? How much does the formative travail cover (anymore) out of the individual existence?

Our pleading is for the *paradigmatic over-turning* at the level of understanding of the becoming-education-man starting from the conviction that “the changes of paradigm set us moving from a way of perceiving world to another” (2. p.18) and from a manner of intervention to another. Such a moving is now absolutely necessary if we want to build and to lead our destiny and not to be “played by the history”. The way in which this overturning outlines, constitutes the object of the approaches which are specific to the philosophy and the sciences of education from now on.

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