

Education and the personal identity

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Abstract:

The human life coincides with a pedagogical itinerary that, if denied, leads to the denial of life itself; in fact, it is not possible for the educative necessities to appear to us as exhaustible, but only as adults, and not always, we are able to realize that the changing exigencies constantly accompany us and correspond to pulsations involving the mind, the body and the interpersonal relations.

Humans are all educating persons and they are actually possible to be educated as long as they don't live isolated or remain abandoned in themselves in the hard efforts to accomplish a continuum of their education, but live instead in a world made of cultures and persons varying from each other.

And it is exactly the presence of these diversities and the confrontation among them that provoke strong changing and as a consequence, the exigency of continuous enrichment and growth in the single individuals.

I. Introduction

In adult life, the development is actuated starting from the deepening and improvement of the cognitive, affective, relational styles, behaviors and convictions constituting the base of personality. In reality, more correctly, it had to be discussed not about an adult age, but about many adult ages, as many as there have been the formulations that various cultures have elaborated to respond to the need of elaboration of the identity itself. (Santelli Beccegato L., 2001).

This question is not set if the organistic model of the specie development is followed, according to which the ages of human life are readable only through the evolution categories in which the adult person results to be a mature individual able to proceed and perpetuate the specie and the culture he is part of. This definition is considered with a detachment by those engaged in social sciences and instead it directs the attention toward ontogenetic aspects of human maturation, re-conducting to relative and various manifestations from an individual to another, posing the subject in front of the obligation to become a personal identity, distinct from the others.

The image of oneself that every individual tries to affirm in respect to others is inspired on the largest autonomy and personal freedom; identity cultures that modern societies, based on the rights of independence and mutual respect, recognize and contribute to formulate a modern idea of adult age (Demetrio, 1990:22-23).

Following this address, the adult's idea is countersigned by temporal instability and, at last analysis, to the individual is entrusted the duty of recognizing the temporality itself.

The age is thus a personal construct, daily revisable and therefore predestined to instability; but the only adequate way to attribute a temporal sense is that of experimenting ourselves in relation to the other and confronting us with the image not always pleasant, reflected by him. The self-representation is at the end of the day an illusion, for which, in reality, either the others are representing us, or we are surpassing the others and thus we reflect and know each other. We always need the mediation of the likes to assign us an identity: the identity, particularly the adult one, is manifested at the moment the subject is able to communicate the others through language or other forms the existence of an own I (Demetrio, 1990:37). The individual builds constantly the own biography, "as a personal story equipped with a sense, in the mediation and interaction with the others and with the circumstances he is living" (Saraceno, 1998:22).

II. The central hypotheses

Once the adult age is defined as a phase of complex human experience, it has to be examined how this complexity, producer of changing, may be stimulated and supported.

The notion that is already individuated and that will be attentively analyzed is that of changing. Some authors have affirmed that correlating changing and adult age, it would be more correct to talk about andragogy; this term means to look at the adult in the sense that the adult needs to self-guide, knows the own availability to apprehend and is interested to learn what is correlated with the resolution of problems of his concrete and daily life.

The central hypotheses of andragogic theory are concentrated around that idea of adult having a conceiving of an autonomous self and feeling the necessity that his independence comes to be recognized. The adult represents a growing reserve of life experiences, that can not be put aside, but instead can be evaluated in formative processes and beyond such experiences they produce changing on organizing of the individual thinking of adult, who needs to learn regarding the part played by him in specific stages of his life (Russillo G., 1998). It is important also to recall, necessarily in a very synthetic way, the contribute and significance of changing at principal currents of psycho-sociological and therapeutic thinking having particularly stressed that the adult age is still an age open to formation (Demetrio, 1990:81).

Starting from the behaviorist approach, the theme of changing may be analyzed above all under the light of link between subject and environment and regarding the influences determined in such an interaction. In this framework, an essential role is played by the concept of apprehension, as the process with which is originated and modified an activity reacting toward an encountered situation. In the transposition in formative framework of the behaviorist model, the education becomes the conditioning of single behaviors, i.e. manipulation. The education therefore is not intended as a complex system of cognitive, affective, social events..., getting influenced among them, but as a series of mental and emotional factors subjected to modification. Changing of the subject occurs therefore through structuring of educative environment.

Meanwhile cognitivism attributes a minor importance to environmental conditioning in the processes of modification and changing. This is due to the fact that for this addressing, the same environmental stimulus is interpreted in a various way by single subjects equipped with characteristics distinguishing each other genetically and socially. The individual is not a simple passive receiver of environmental stimuli, but he elaborates them starting from his own mental cognition. It is in this sense that the education of adults is conceived as an education of mind, activation of processes with the subject being able to respond by changing what constitutes his imagine of the world. The changing is intended as a representative transformation occurring firstly at cognitive level and then it is able to influence also the emotive and affective area.

At the end, the intimate approach taken in consideration is that of cultural psychology, according to which the individual is equipped not only with a cognitive dimension, but also with an affective, social, and historical dimension characterizing and making it unique. Such presuppositions fund a vision of changing presenting innovations compared to the preceding ones: above all, the subject transforms the own cognitive model in relation to the comprehension of the own cognitive processes and not on the results; the changing is relational, i.e. it takes advantage from the role of those interacting with the thinking mind. In other words, the changing is aviated when the individual realizes that, from the position of a passive receiver, he can become the actor of formation of the own knowing by acquiring the rules of use.

Generally, the changing is considered as a rupture of experience, of the preceding systems and of interpretation of reality, with which persons move in the world and organize their own life.

If it is true that the changing implies a modification, then one may come prepared either due to a foreseen transformation in the biographic model, or due to the opportunities of changing being part of the own model of value or of the own project of life. Vice versa, one may come unprepared either due to the fact that the event provoked by the changing comes completely unexpected, or due to the fact that changing in relation of the foreseen path is perceived as risky and negative (Morgagni – Pepa, 1993:111)

III. The formation of adults

The prospective of educating for the changing means various things and implies various strategies of apprehension. On one hand, it means providing such cognitive resources to allow the individual either an anticipatory socialization of changing, transitions, predicted or unpredicted, or a capacity of reading the reality allowing to distinguish the possible opportunities and paths for an individual process of changing. On the other hand, it means providing cognitive resources, relational abilities and psychological competences to affront unpredicted and even traumatic changing.

Returning to the formation of adults, an important observation is that of having access to a path, to a formative experience that, far from the professional and cultural contents, provides resources for the development of social competences intended as relational capacities, i.e. to establish and negotiate diversified relations, also as capacities of reality reading.

Persons capable and competent in their own social world may find themselves lost as they are exposed to other rules. It is a feeling experienced by everybody going to live in a foreign country, as he must apprehend the mechanisms, the formal and informal rules, the relational styles regulating the associated life.

The fact is that for many persons also their own country is foreign as they find themselves out of the borders of the own groups of immediate reference. For this reason, it is necessary to provide competences of translation from a group to another, from a culture to another, occasions of confronting and apprehension (Morgagni-Pepa, 1993:123).

What are in such a case the aims to be followed? The most relevant ones are the cognitive aims and those of psychosocial character. The formers must know to develop capacities of critic and self-critic analysis in respect to themes of their complex nature: they must also know to develop capacities of dialogic confronting in respect to personal and collective situations, historically and culturally "else". The latter must be able to cause the emerging and gaining

conscience, as singles or as groups, on the existence of attitudes and behaviors ethically and socially denied, but sometimes factually shared.

If these represent the aims to be reached, there are problems raised in front of permanent education implying the totality of human individual and social life and consisting in an effort of correction, of organizing, of directing the acculturation process.

The aim of this effort is that of every educative process: to accomplish the social interaction and personal growth processes avoiding the own disequilibrium, traumas and distortion of the socio-cultural life (Laporta, 1979: 53).

The permanent education can not be limited to assume the cultures where it operates in their consistence and historical existence. Its duty is not that of perpetuating, but that of rendering as effective and harmonic as possible the relation of acculturation necessarily established by them with the accommodating culture. Its fundamental problem is always that of respecting the personality of the person to be educated and consequently of the whole culture represented and incarnated by him.

The sociality is funded on the assumption of jointly liable behaviors allowing to the individuals to react peacefully, but also in conflicting manner when necessary, distinguishing attentively the conflicting dynamics from every form of violence (Novara D., 2004). The groups and communities are a place where the adulthood is tested and developed.

The apprehension of cohabitation and collaboration rules starts very early and constitutes, in the whole course of life, a functional need for the material and psychological survival of the single individual. The lost of societal ties, and their crisis and inconvenience that gives what is derived, is equivalent also to the threat of that essential practice constituted by the dimension of reciprocity. The negotiation and conflict are insistent and not removable phenomena, a social interaction finalized in the attainment of public and private aims and benefits (Demetrio, 1990:134).

The exchange is the result of progressive apprehension and acculturation; the adult lives moments of exchange on many fronts, finding himself therefore in

affronting tasks putting him in situations of advantage and prestige. In groups, the adult doesn't learn only to decide and compete, but the group and community are collective forms of territorial identification, of maintaining the own roots.

The exchange and reciprocity, in such a case, are occasions of emancipation from ignorance and misery and serve to trace the profile of adulthood engaged in the work of evaluation of the own conditions of life against exploitation and injustice.

Learning to work, or to stay in group, and to find the solidarity of others is therefore another moment through which the adulthood is built renouncing from the own individualism in the name of common interests.

An aspect walking beside the changing and apprehension, always talking about education and formation of adults, and more precisely the effort needed to actuate is that of reaching a better comprehension of the act to be apprehended, of the process characterizing it and of other processes of which it is inseparable. Cultural mutations we are living, in international and local level, put the educative systems, organizations and institutions in the center of a storm for which we were not prepared (Josso, 1995:28).

While the act of apprehension goes toward an individualization of the educative process, the paths of formation must be conceived to answer the needs of a society that often doesn't know even where it is directed.

IV. Conscience and abilities

Forming and transforming qua person, forming and transforming qua professionals and as socio-cultural actors; apprehending doesn't mean any more only learning this or that, but it means discovering new ways of thinking and acting differently; it means starting from searching of what could this "differently". It is this why nowadays we observe that the act of apprehension, transformed into an act of searching, could permit to those apprehending to develop the creativity, their ability, their capacities of valuation, of communication and negotiation.

The process of apprehension is fundamentally an informal one. In effect, there is an informal formative process working not only at conscience level, but

also at unconscious one and these informal educative processes get activated in the young subject as well as in the adult one.

The education of adults have worked much trying to eliminate this separated vision of making education, but it hasn't gone to fare in the pedagogical projectuality (G. Alessandrini, 1995:64).

The concept of apprehension presents a constellation of concepts pertinent to contents and forms of conscience and abilities the individual acquires and elaborates in the course of instruction.

The first concept is related to the organizing of conscience; the information the individual acquires in the course of the own experience during the daily life do not constitute isolated elements, but represent organized structures of conscience; the schemas. These act as anchorage for the new elements of information, in the sense that they allow recognizing and assimilating the specific examples of facts and events encountered by the individual.

The schemas have a constructive function as long as they don't receive simply the information, but build it; the other function is related to the productivity of conscience. The conscience, being vast and deepened into a problem of area of experience, allows to the individual to make useful interferences to understand the new situations, helps him to frame better facts and elements and to formulate predictions (Morgagni-Pepa, 1993:220).

The second subgroup of concepts belongs to the strategies of regulation and control the adult puts in act while apprehending. The apprehension is an active process as long as the pupil plans the own apprehension, controls it and verifies the obtained results.

A third and last subgroup of concepts belongs to the general or specific character of knowledge and abilities. The theories of apprehension applied in the instruction have shown that knowledge and abilities acquired at school are possible to be generalized in different contexts. In effect, due above all to the contributions of intercultural researches, this assumption has been strongly put in discussion: ability and consciences are not independent from the context they are apprehended and used, but they are correlated to them (Morgagni-Pepa, 1993:222).

The apprehension is the result of formation; it is important to distinguish to two kinds of apprehension: the simple one, occurring through the addition of new elements in the sense that the preceding culture of the individual comes augmented, but not modified in its elements; the other kind is the complex one occurring above all through modification of the preceding cognitive field of person, in other words, the complex apprehension underlines the fact that culture of the individual gets modified.

While the simple one addresses the attention on the instruction of the new, the complex apprehension addresses the attention to the new connection the individual must establish among new things and things already existing in his experience. This complex is referred above all to the formation of adults being already experts in their work and for whom apprehending means always adding, but also primarily modifying.

Learning new consequences and capacities relative to the exercise of the own working role involves a modification in the notion the subject has of his own role and image. This is derived by the fact that the cognitive and psychological field of person constitutes a system and, relying on the law of systems, an action on a part of the system determines possible actions and relations not only in that part, but also in all the other subsystems interdependent among themselves. In an analogous way, in the individual's cultural system, a variation of the subsystem, acquaintances and capacities determines changes also in all the other subsystems such as the perception of global role and conceiving of professionalism (Bruscaglioni, 1991:43-44).

It is possible to conjecture a general model of adult's apprehension in three stages: since the beginning, the adult has a global vision of what he has to learn either because he is already an expert of work he is updated with, or because he has elaborated fantasies on such psychologically significant issues, whereby described by emotional aspects. The formation must work on this global initial representation that will influence on ways of apprehension of the successive details.

In the second phase, the adult learns the various proposed notions being able in a certain sense to self-govern his learning: in fact, every notion corresponds to a logical position in a correct global design possessed by him already since the preceding phase.

During the last phase, the global is reexamined for a consolidation of the final integrated result and for an eventual perfection of what has been learned.

By observations made always on the adults, it is evidenced how they really learn something as the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations act together. The extrinsic motivations of learning are those connected to the result the individual obtains such as, for example, an award, feeling better prepared, the power and ability to reach new objectives.

Probably these are indispensable to motivate the individual to enter and adhere to the didactic situation. The intrinsic motivations instead are those consisting in pleasure-gratifications during the very learning, such as, for example, the so-called interest for the subject, the enjoyment to exercise the own intellectual capacities and to grow. These are indispensable to determine the complex apprehension, i.e. to modify the cognitive and psychological preceding field.

The task of formation is not that of stressing the apprehension of subjects without any motivations, but that of utilizing the already existing motivations; often the true challenge consists in knowing to release the potential and latent potentials finding difficulties to emerge (Bruscaglioni, 1991:47-48-54).

Another aspect considered in a wide sphere regarding learning is the one regarding the constitution of a group that, from a psychological point of view, seems to be favorable and to help this process even in the adults' education. To explain the phenomenon of specific aid provided by the group situation to the result of the apprehension changing, some orders of factors, among which the fact that the participation at a group activity allow and facilitate the opportunities of individuals to elaborate better the own doubts and perplexities and through the interpersonal interactions, facilitate the emerging of emotional aspects having a strong capacity of energy mobilizing.

The second order of factors underline that the changing of individuals has been made difficult also by the preceding cultural “appertaining” of individuals or reference groups for which learning new things and changing means betraying such groups of appertaining and violating the norms that were interiorized by the person. At the end, the third order of factors considers the active group of learning as a seat of interpersonal representation. The dynamics that among persons and subgroups are manifested in the appertaining group of learning constitute also the representation of dynamics acting in the interior of every individual. Therefore it is to conjecture that every individual has in himself various and diverse tendencies and options, elements of differentiated behaviors and non-homogenous cultural pushes (Bruscaglioni, 1991:123-125).

V. Last remarks

In conclusion, we can say that a subject particularly equilibrated or, as it is expressed today, open and flexible, will be characterized by all this: for the various parts will be also possible for them to be integrated among each other, but they will inevitably determine also uncertainties, indecisions and some tensions and conflict in the living interior of a person. All this occurs above all if there are phases of new and difficult changing, transitions, themes.

It is really of such things that the formation is interested and its task is to favor the manifestation of diverse positions among individuals; it favors the construction of an effective communication system and this means that it is possible to facilitate the confrontation and to build a differentiated, but also integrated incorporation of the positions and opinions of various persons.

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