

Incontro pedagogico europeo – Cadine (TN - Italia) 9-10 ottobre 2010

EDUCATION: AN ACT OF LOVE

INTRODUCTION

International Committee Edu

1. PRIORITIES OF MEANING FOR EDUCATION

Everyone's attention has been caught by the identity crisis and the painful struggle of post-modern culture, compounded by the crisis in education, if not by the "end of education."¹ We are experiencing a "fluid"² life in common, closed in on individuality,³ in which the anthropological questions are always less discussed and are often hushed up⁴: "Who is the human being?"; "Where is he/she headed?"; "How?"; "With whom?"; "What are the different dimensions of life?"

Fundamental questions, which must put us to the test, first of all as educators. It involves priorities of meaning which take us directly to the heart of education - its essence, needs and reality - and to the person's being and potential being.

It is a challenge whose immediate urgency and enormous capacity, in terms of resources, must be considered; not only with financial resources, but above all with energies and means of a psychological and moral nature, which are necessary to find the courage to educate. It is a new horizon in which many people, even though from different cultures, faiths and scientific backgrounds, try to recognize themselves in one will, that of retaining a common educative denominator.⁵

¹ N. Postmann, *La fine dell'educazione*, Armando, Rome 1997. Already in the thirties, the Dutch historian, J. Huizinga, questioned himself on the crisis of civilization (*La crisi della civiltà*, Einaudi, Turin 1962); C. Taylor spoke of the "discomfort of civilization," (*Il disagio della modernità*, Armando, Rome 1999). Cfr. also: Ivan Illich, *Descolarizzare la società*, Mondadori, Milan 1983 (op orig. 1971).

In recent years, a huge bulk of official documents have been produced (for example: the OECD Report, *Uno sguardo sull'educazione*, September 2009; the final Report of the General UNESCO Conference, *Quale educazione per l'avvenire?*, October 2009), which try always more to call one's attention to some important questions regarding the centrality of education and its decisive role for human development. Speeches and research projects, at a worldwide level, indicate how the question is already assuming the characteristic of a real emergency, maybe the most difficult to face, also because there are many variables and strong conditions which come into play in the education of the young generations.

² Z. Bauman, *Vita liquida*, Laterza, Bari 2008.

³ M. Zambrano, *Persona e democrazia*, Mondadori, Milan 2000, p. 2.

⁴ Committee for the cultural project of the Italian Episcopal Conference (by), *Per un'idea di educazione*, in "La sfida educativa", Laterza, Bari 2009, pp. 3-24. As Martin Buber sustains (*Il principio dialogico*, S. Paolo, Milan 1993), the anthropological problem is that of *relationship*, through which people rise above things and fulfill their responsibility as a form of reciprocity and love. Therefore, without the "You," not even the "I" could exist, so much that one can sustain that the greatest contemporary *cultural and educational challenge*, on every level, lies precisely in the capacity to witness and be an impulse to dialogue, which adults should know how to transmit to the younger generations.

⁵ There are crucial points of meaning, which are absolutely necessary for a convergence that is able to defend some fundamental human rights, apart from the different ideological reasons which sustain it, as Jacques Maritain underscored (Cfr. J. Maritain, *L'educazione al bivio*, Brescia 1981).

2. LOVE EDUCATES

In our first “Congress on Education” – “Education as Love” – we had highlighted how love is “inscribed in the DNA of every man and woman on earth” and for this reason “it responds to the needs of all times and of all human societies.”⁶

Therefore, the true nature of people lies in love, their deepest and primordial vocation, symbolized in childbirth by the children’s cry when they are born. It is a wail which certainly expresses the fear of the original abandonment, but also the longing to be welcomed in the mother’s arms, in so far as the human being, in order to exist, above all needs to be loved.

From this comes the deduced conviction that “love educates” and that being loved is the first, fundamental condition necessary to learn not only to love, but also to know and to give true meaning to our journey of freedom.

Therefore, it seems clear that we are not highlighting the need for some positive feeling which permits us to establish good educator-student relationships, confining love to the categories of good intentions or of religious spirit, but that of bringing reflection back to the foundations and to the educative relationship itself.

First of all we need to ask ourselves: can love have full citizenship in reflections on education? What love are we talking about?

And again: if love is inscribed in our being and is therefore a constitutive element of education, is there a course where we as educators can learn to love and to involve our sons and daughters, our young people in this reciprocal, inalienable horizon? We are not talking about opting for an easy moralizing speech, but rather to go to the root of our vocation in education.

As educators we are therefore not only questioned individually, but also as a community of educators: we are asked to face the course of reflection, study, programming and continuing education with courage, commitment and effort, so that our role as educators can be carried out with ever more care and competence.

3. ART OF LOVING, ART OF EDUCATING

In order to understand the daily panorama better, it is good to consider how the topic of the love-education relationship has been approached in different eras, in every aspect of life. It’s a perspective that also makes us look back, to better understand the different “anthropological viewpoints” through which we have tried to interpret the educator-student relationship.

Plato’s writings reveal the constant tension towards the supreme Good which unites an educator and student, while Augustine suggests that in order to talk to children, we must adapt ourselves “with fraternal, paternal and maternal love to whoever listens to us.”⁷ De La Salle echoes his words by saying: “If you show the firmness of a father in pulling them back (the children) from evil, you should also show the tenderness of a mother in gathering them together;”⁸ while John Bosco highlights the importance for young people to “know that they are loved,”⁹ and so on throughout the different eras.

But, in spite of these examples, in giving a rapid overall glance, we are struck by the fact that love, even though often presented throughout the centuries as the basis of an authentic educative

⁶ E. Fondi , *Dio Amore nell’esperienza di Chiara Lubich*, Rome 2000.

⁷ Saint Augustine, *La catechesi*, Città Nuova, Rome, 2005, p. 125. If, in fact, for the saint of Hippo “the truth lives in a person’s inner being” and the way to reach it is always Love: “we don’t enter in the Truth if not through Love” (Saint Augustine, *Contro Fausto Manicheo*, 32,18, Città Nuova, Rome 2004)

⁸ De La Salle, *Meditations*, 101,3 p. 400

⁹ Cfr. Don Bosco, *lettera del 10/5/1884*

relationship, has rarely been able to sensitively influence the system, for a true and proper curriculum at a didactic level.

Erich Fromm speaks about it as a pressing “knowledge,” which people need: “we run to watch unending soap operas..., we listen to love songs and yet no one believes that there is something to be learned in love matters.”¹⁰ Certainly love cannot only coincide with emotions and, as it is with every human behaviour, it’s evident that we must and can learn it. In this way, we can affirm that we learn to love, like every true art which asks for a constant and passionate dedication. On the other hand, as John Dewey affirms, even education “without a doubt, in concrete praxis is an art,”¹¹ different, but not in contrast with science. So, like every art that we learn when we are small, it is handed on from father to son, from teacher to student, with theory, technique and example.

In order to learn an art – Fromm continued – “We can divide the process in two parts: theory and practice. ... But, in addition to knowing theory and practice, there is a third factor which is necessary to become a ‘teacher’ in any art: there mustn’t be anything in the world which is more important.”¹² And in order to do it, one needs to have discipline, concentration and patience in every phase of life.”¹³

Therefore, if we look at love, we need to have a clear conscience that nothing is more important than loving, teaching to love and acting accordingly.

This is the deep and vital conviction that we find in Chiara Lubich’s thought and actions. A conviction that brought her to bear witness to the art of loving in every environment and all over the world, offering to people of every creed, to politicians as well as economists, to media workers as well as educators, a simple and universal way to live this original art.

Her many reflections inspired us in preparing this meeting and we would like to offer a brief videoclip in which Chiara, on occasion of the conferment of the Honorary Citizenship of Rome to her (January 2000), speaks about the art of loving, offering a methodology to this city, to see to it that it may be always more a city where everyone can feel at home.

¹⁰ E.Fromm, in “Introduzione”, *L’arte di amare*, Mondadori, Milan 1995.

¹¹ J. Dewey, *Le fonti di una scienza dell’educazione*, La nuova Italia, Florence 1951, p. 6 (original title in English: *The Sources of a Science of Education*, 1929).

¹² E. Fromm, Op.cit., pp.13-14

¹³ Ibidem, p. 139