

Teacher Models Compared and Contrasted: A Matter of Educated as in Well-Read, or is it a Question of Being Competent, or Aware?

Giuliano Franceschini, PhD
Università di Firenze
Professor of General and Special Education
Piazza di San Marco, 4, 50121 Firenze FI, Italy

Abstract

The article addresses the question of the teacher's competences from different points of view: historical, epistemological, didactic. The purpose is to resolve the relationship between competence and awareness, utility and desirability. Indeed, the contemporary teacher risks dissolving into a multiplicity of skills. For this reason it is necessary a theoretical, historical and operational reflection on the unity of the teaching function. A solid and unitary professional profile of the teacher may be more appropriate to address the educational problems of the school. The inclusive and conscious teacher seems more suitable to understand the needs of contemporary students, to work in groups, to relate to the families of the students. Culture, awareness, methodological competence is the three key concepts around which the article develops.

Keywords: awareness, methodological competences, cultural teacher, technical rationality, scientific approach to teaching, critical pedagogy, conscious teaching, constructivist, cooperative didactic approach.

Introduction

The present contribution hypothesizes the existence of three teacher models: the cultural-transmission teacher, the competent-effective teacher, the conscious-inclusive teacher. The succession in which they are presented is only partly chronological because the three respective professional models which they represent - (i) centrality of the contents to be taught, (ii) methodological and didactic competences, (iii) ability to reflect critically on the aims and outcomes of schooling - are present in the theoretical reflections on teachers and in the practice of schooling since ancient times. However, if we focus our attention on the twenty-first century, we can dare to say that the primacy of the educated or well-read teacher – a long-standing tradition identified with so-called bourgeois pedagogy, characteristic of aristocratic and idealistic nineteenth and early twentieth century ideas and culture - begins to decline after the Second World War, thanks to the rise of the idea of the competent teacher¹ based, initially, on the basis of the educational and pedagogical suggestions of activism and, later, on cognitivism, ideas renewed today in the research on the idea of the effective teaching and effective teaching-methodology². At the turn of this century, the reflective teacher model draws attention; here, we refer to this model as that of the conscious and inclusive teacher who is more attentive to context and social relations³.

The cultural teacher model and its focus on contents

By the term 'cultural teacher' we refer to the most traditional and resistant teacher model. The historical and pedagogical complexity of this model cannot be reduced to the well-known formula adopted in Italian idealistic pedagogy which purports that those who possess 'knowledge', also know how to teach. The educational objective pursued by the cultural teacher is to duplicate, replicate and transmit the cultural heritage of the proceeding generations so as to ensure the perpetuity of traditions in future generations while, at the same time, preventing ethical and cognitive regression within the community⁴.

1 F. Ghilardi, *La professione docente negli anni '90. Un confronto con l'Europa*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1990.

2 A. Calvani, *Principi dell'istruzione e strategie per insegnare. Criteri per una didattica efficace*, Carocci, Roma 2011.

3 Cfr., Agenzia europea per i Bisogni Educativi Speciali e l'Istruzione Inclusiva, *Teacher Education for Inclusion: Profile of Inclusive Teachers*, <https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/Profile-of-Inclusive-Teacher.pdf>

4 As stated, this concept of the role of the teacher was particularly well-received in the Italian context in the idealistic pedagogy of Gentile (1875–1944) ; it greatly influenced school pedagogy not only in the Fascist period with Gentile's 1923 School Reform, but also in the post-war period especially in the context of higher education and teacher-training. Gentile's refute of the scientific and experimental aspects related to pedagogy, especially those highlighted by late 19th century positive pedagogy isolated Italian pedagogy of the first half of the 20th century from those epistemological and operational

The origins of the cultural teacher model

The genealogy of the cultural teacher model is extremely complex and has its roots in ancient times; for this reason it has remained and still remains an essential and important reference point in both pedagogical reflection and educational practice. The idea of the teacher as a cultured, expert, and wise individual emerges far back in Western culture in the aristocratic view of education and training that originates in Ancient Greece and spreads from that point in time until it becomes part of the present and remains a fixed reference-point. From a historical viewpoint, beginning with Homer, this teaching archetype initially emerges in the form of the tutor of the heroes, princes and nobles often described and represented in literary, historical, theatrical works, or the biographies and autobiographies of famous people⁵. This tutor bases his teaching activities on his authoritative role based on his experience, culture, exemplary behaviour together with the full and unconditional educational mandate that the student's family has entrusted to him. In teaching practice, the purpose of the tutor is to replicate in the pupil the training that the teacher-tutor has completed to achieve the moral and intellectual perfection that he enjoys. Hence, it is based on two main tools: the reference to canonical examples of behavior and culture which are of particular significance and worthy of study, and are represented within the different traditional areas of human knowledge, together with the personal advice needed in what can be difficult times for the individual. It is an aristocratic model of the teacher-figure that draws attention to several problems which still persist.

Education as a caste privilege in the cultural teacher model

The cultural or educated teacher who is exemplary and wise is, above all, also an educator because he aims to teach virtue together with knowledge. Indeed, for him there is no clear division between the two dimensions. For this reason, the study of exemplary and authoritative actions and characters is so important, as is the teacher-student relationship which, precisely because it is also oriented towards educational purposes, education towards values, and *in to* resembles a parental relationship such as that between parents and children. The purpose of the training course carried out by the cultural i.e. educated or well-read teacher is, first of all, an ideal of human perfection that is not necessarily linked to the learning of some specific profession or occupation. Rather, it is the ideal of the education and training of man in all his human potential. However, this formative ideal encounters two major limitations that derive from the aristocratic matrix from which it emerges: first, the idea of training and teaching as ways to perfection and to the expression of all human potential, is accompanied by the prejudice that not all individuals can achieve such perfection, because human nature changes on the basis of gender, geographical origin, income, alleged racial diversity that, as we know today through studies of genetics, does not exist within Homo Sapiens. In what we can consider the 'aristocratic perspective of training' which still exists in different forms, education remains a privilege for a few; the latter will then have the possibility of governing the rest of the population, for which it is possible to envisage possible subordinate and differentiated education-training courses. Thus, education-training transforms itself into social selection and those who experience this selection and pay for it are above all women, the poor, foreigners, etc.. In this way, schooling and education reflect and propose a hierarchical social organization which is rigidly stratified by class and remains impenetrable to any upward social mobility on the part of the poor, with few exceptions to this rule. This is the result of a paternalistic, philanthropic, welfare and charitable attitude towards some individuals capable of demonstrating specific cognitive talents.

The role of tradition in the cultural teacher model

From an aristo-pedagogical point of view, the student's development path is absolutely squashed between the authority of tradition, canons, writers, texts, and that of the teacher who represents - in flesh and blood - the ideal to which the student aspires. In this education-training vortex there is no room for student freedom and individuality which must be sacrificed when faced with authority. Last but not least, let us not forget an issue that is particularly relevant for the

developments which were to have profound effects on post-war school organization in the U.S, England and France. In the latter contexts, the idea of teaching supported by research in psychology, experimental teaching-methodology and the objective assessment of learning took root. In Italy, instead, it was a return to the cultural basis of teacher-training based primarily on the historico-philosophical approach to the exclusion of evolutionary and general psychology as well as pedagogy and teaching-methodology from the curricula of the teacher-training institutes and the teacher degree-courses, with the results that can still be seen today in the teaching-practices in secondary education.

cf. L. Borghi, *Educazione e autorità nell'Italia moderna*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1974 (ed. or. 1951), p. 250.

5 On the aristocratic nature of education in Ancient Greece see W. Jaeger (1944), *Paideia. La formazione dell'uomo greco. L'età arcaica. Apogeo e crisi dello spirito attico*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1953. Jaeger in his monumental and detailed three-volume research identifies the explicit and implicit pedagogic motifs in the Homeric epic starting with the literary and philosophical productions of Ancient and Classical Greece in order to demonstrate their effect on modern-day western education in which ' [...] for the first time, education becomes culture, that is the education and training of an individual's personality based on a model' Ibidem, p.60.

analysis of the didactic tradition.

The cultural i.e. educated or well-read teacher is not particularly interested in pedagogical or didactic reflection related to the most appropriate means and techniques to achieve effective teaching, nor does he give particular importance to the psychological processes involved in learning.

The teaching strategies par excellence are those of face-to-face lessons, the study of texts, argumentative explanation, etc. The main aim is to encourage contact between the student-spirit and the collective one as expressed in the literary and scientific products of human culture encountered. Thus, the focus in this logic, lies in the primary role of the programme syllabus, that is, of the contents to be taught; the latter is absolute, to the detriment of any individual or local contextual need⁶.

The success of the cultural teacher model

This cultural or educated-well-read teacher model has been very successful in Western pedagogical theory and practice not only in ancient and medieval, but also in recent times. In fact, we find it, more than ever, in the conservative and reactionary bourgeois, aristocratic and clerical pedagogy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which the ideal aristocratic education-training centered on moral perfection is replaced by that of national education-training values which respect class differences and male supremacy. More specifically, it is mainly high school and university teachers who adopt this model, but also elementary school teachers are fascinated by it, especially in Italy during the liberal period, the Fascist period and also later, in the first decades of the Republic. Thus, teachers identify themselves in the figure of the all-knowing master with a preparation focusing on a cultural nature, inherent in the contents of teaching rather than oriented towards the knowledge of learning processes and teaching techniques⁷. The rise of mass schooling, initially in basic schooling and then in the secondary schooling contexts, the diffusion of a progressive pedagogy animated by social ideals that are less discriminatory and sensitive to the evidence of psychological, anthropological and genetic scientific research, the evolution of the contemporary geopolitical framework towards an internationalization of economic and cultural policies, all of the above distance the basic assumptions of aristocratic and bourgeois pedagogy from its origins, and mark its irreversible decline. However, in times of economic crisis, a restrictive education policy tends to return to vogue, reducing funding for mass public schools and encouraging, if not financing, private elite schools, attended only by children of the middle and upper middle classes who are able to bear the high costs. In these conditions, the quality of the public educational offer can be weakened to the advantage of the private one, which can thrive also because it is able to select its own incoming users, on the basis of income or denominational beliefs or ethnic affiliation. In this way, the basic principle of aristocratic pedagogy, the differentiated access to training on the basis of class re-emerges with all the entailed side-effects related to the education-training of a society organized into rigidly separated strata of the population. Nonetheless, it is not possible to disregard the model of the cultural teacher slightly, because we risk falling into an ideological position as risky as that of the previously-mentioned aristocracy and bourgeoisie.

Current state of the cultural teacher model

Certainly, the teacher must be a particularly cultured (educated and well-read) individual not only in the disciplines (s)he teaches but also in terms of general and historical cultural dimensions that characterize the wider social environment in which the educational institutions exist. The cultural preparation of the teacher is not a supplementary element of his profession; rather, in its absence, the teacher's function is reduced to that of an official who takes care of pupils in place of parents, unable to bring about in children and young people those cultural changes for which he was trained and selected. The cultural preparation to which we refer, can no longer be understood as the mere possession of a set of notions, however vast it may be, but with the mastery of the disciplinary epistemology that organizes the history, concepts, languages of the individual disciplines and the relationships between the various disciplines. The latter epistemological mastery is achieved through a continuous and thorough study of individual disciplines, their history, as well as the contemporary frontiers of research within each knowledge-area.

Cultural canons

Another extremely delicate and open question is related to the relationship between school education and cultural canons. We have seen that for the cultural teacher model, contact with the most significant examples of culture, be they

6 It is worthwhile re-iterating that it is within this pedagogic and methodological model that Italian Idealistic Pedagogy takes root focusing on an authoritarian-type of teacher and a strong asymmetric teacher-pupil model which was to strongly influence the training of Italian teachers for the greater part of the 20th Century. [...] Gentile's schooling model is that of the teacher and the culture to be transmitted; it has nothing to do with the whole child, his needs and interests [...]. F. Cambi, *Le pedagogie del Novecento*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2005, p. 41.

7 Cfr., A. Santoni Rugiu, *Maestre e maestri. La difficile storia degli insegnanti elementari*, Carocci, Roma 2006.

literary works, heroic characters or scientific discoveries, represents the central point by means of which to link the education of the new generations to the values of the cultural tradition that preceded them so as to achieve the full and mature realization of human nature which distinguishes the cultural dimension from simple biological, natural and animal existence.

This represents a central question in the pedagogy of schooling since it is beyond doubt that the works produced by human genius are more than a simple individual production, they represent in exemplary form the uniqueness of the human being which, in cultural productions, shows how it is possible through the use of reason, artistic talent, tenacity in study and research, to access those dimensions of knowledge that would otherwise be lacking. For this reason a literary work, a philosophical argument, an example of historical or anthropological research, permits the interpretation of the most intimate human feelings, the understanding of the emotional dynamics in social relations, the analysis of the political organization of a given historical moment. In the same way, scientific research in the physical and natural environment can facilitate the overcoming of anthropocentric positions in relationships with other living beings and with the dimensions of the infinitely small and the infinitely large that are the basis of our daily life experience which, however, can risk going unnoticed if they are not stimulated by the cultural experiences that schooling offers children and young people. Without this cultural interaction, the individual remains in a precultural and prescientific state at the mercy of superstition, irrationality, fear, and is very likely to end up falling into the trap of some ideological siren which can direct him/her towards violent, asocial, unjust behavior. So it is certainly true that cultural and scientific education is an essential objective of schooling. The problem is that in the contemporary social, economic and, indeed, cultural situation, the references to literary and scientific canons whether national or international e.g. Western or Asian, is inadequate⁸. A modern-day child who learns and matures through the study of literary and scientific works exclusively typical of the environment in which (s)he was born, will come face to face with specific difficulties in understanding contemporary social dynamics which are now irreversibly oriented towards global and international dimensions. If the cultural approach to schooling wishes to survive, and it is to be hoped that this will happen, it cannot help but confront what we can call species education-training which assigns equal dignity to the cultural productions of every part of the planet with a view to the education-training of a human community finally free from the conflicts which come into existence precisely from the exasperation of cultural differences, entrenchment in traditions that have exhausted their historical significance, denial of the unity of the species. The cultural (i.e. educated or well-read) teacher, therefore, has his own reason for existence in so far as (s)he manages to grasp the elements of unity and difference in individual cultural canons without prejudice, while at the same time avoiding easy positions of tolerance that are completely unacceptable in relation to the limits that each culture inevitably tends to generate within itself.

The contemporary role of the cultural teacher model

If the aristocratic teacher-tutor figure intended to train young princes in the values of tradition, virtue and honour typical of the hero, by detaching them from the dominion of myth and superstition and elevating them above all other common mortals whose nature remained indifferent and unsuitable for moral perfection, and if the bourgeois cultural teacher proposed to train the new generations in the values and behaviour of bourgeois morals under the banner of social and economic progress which in any case provides for a rigid division into classes among which only the economically stronger have the right to a complete education, the contemporary teacher can only enhance the 'transmission' of all those cultural experiences which tend to recognize the equality and equity or 'equal dignity' of every human being without discrimination of any kind, in view of a cultural unity of the species which still needs to be constructed. Current global society has achieved interconnectivity of individuals only through the economic and/or technological dimension. It has not addressed the question of cultural differences that thus resurface in a conflictual form, not addressed, at a distance, annihilated by the dominance of business and economic transactions, so as to reach the paradoxical situation in which things, money, objects, products, have been granted free movement throughout the planet while a large number of human beings are banned from moving, even if the migratory movements are triggered by serious issues related to economic malaise, civil wars, environmental disasters. It is precisely from this paradox i.e. the supremacy of objects and things⁹ over human beings that the demand for culture in schooling and not only in schools wants to make itself heard in a loud voice. This is a challenge that puts the role and cultural function of the teacher back on track, precisely to underline the importance of cultural transmission in the education-training of a new

8 The issue of cultural canons and their transmission at school is quite relevant here, starting with the choice of reading materials in infant school and continuing with the choice of authors to be studied at later stages of schooling, which cultural, social, political traditions to propose and analyze. The topic is studied in detail in M. Baldacci, *Ripensare il curricolo. Principi educativi e strategie didattiche*, Carocci, Roma 2006. For a more detailed study of the topic see F. Cambi, *Sul canone della pedagogia occidentale*, Carocci, Roma 2009.

9 With regard to the influence of objects on human life see R. Barthes 1954 - 1957 in an Italian version entitled *Miti d'oggi*, Einaudi, Torino. Ibidem, p. 51.

generation of human-beings capable of facing the challenges that await them in the near future, such as those linked to environmental emergencies, the expected depletion of fossil fuels and mass international migration.

The competent teacher model and its focus on methodology and didactics

This is probably the teacher model closest to contemporary schooling. Nowadays, the concept of competence is at the centre of the pedagogical debate on teacher training, but also this teacher model has its roots in ancient times. The origins of the competent teacher model The fathers of the training professionals are undoubtedly the Sophists¹⁰. Indeed, it is they who first perceive and acknowledge the demand for training implicit in the urban organization of human life which requires above all a skilful use of oral and written language, of rhetoric and dialectic, as indispensable tools which can assert themselves on the political and economic scene typical of the Greek polis. The development of virtue takes second place to that of oratory ability and argumentative competence, achievable only through a constant and lasting exercise. However, it remains a class model of training since, although it recognizes the possibility for all to learn, it is in fact reserved for those who can economically afford it. From the didactic point of view, however, it is very important to highlight the shift made by the Sophists, that is, the transformation of authoritative examples and literary canons of reference into pure tools for learning and for the education-training and development of precise skills¹¹. The Sophist no longer uses the classics only and exclusively for ethical purposes, but, more importantly, also and above all from a didactic point of view as formal examples from which to learn the techniques that the student will then use in his profession to achieve completely different goals from those that are the basis of the examples studied. Nor does the Sophist propose himself as a moral example to be taken as an ideal training, but only as a competent model and expert in particular fields of human action. Moreover, in the new education-training curriculum proposed by the Sophists there is also ample space for non-literary disciplines including subjects such as astronomy, mathematics, medicine, thus starting what will later become the scientific branch of schooling.

The Jesuit tradition

With regard to the development of the contemporary competent (methodological-didactic) teacher model, the religious teachers who occupy almost the entire didactic scenario between the Middle Ages and Modernity fulfil an intermediate historico-conceptual stance. These are teachers engaged within monasteries and religious colleges. Their exemplary model, especially in terms of further or higher education involves those teachers who belong to the Jesuit order (1540)¹². They still base their teaching on the principle of authority, more specifically on religious authority, and the main purpose of their didactic action is that of the education-training of the cultured religious whose task it is to educate the faithful and/or administer monasteries and parishes. However, although teaching is totally conceived of in terms of religious aims, a certain methodological sensitivity, expressed by the Jesuits in a didactic organization of the contents of learning and of the modes of teaching, which anticipates in an exemplary way the approach to modern didactic, planning, is beginning to make its impact. The need to organize the students into classes, the importance of organizing the teaching-contents based on the progression of learning, the attention to the organization of the school day time wise together with how methodologies give way to one another, although they give rise to a highly rigid and selective form of didactic organization typical of Jesuit colleges, they nonetheless represent a move towards a modern approach when compared with the ancient didactic tradition. Hence, in part this foreshadows the competent teacher idea which characterizes contemporary didactic approaches.

The primacy of technical rationality

From the point of view of the competent teacher, the pedagogical principle of authority which guides the didactic action of the cultural teacher is replaced by that of technical rationality, usefulness and effectiveness of teaching - aspects typical of the contemporary pedagogical debate. Today's competent teacher is, however, far removed from the pedagogical and didactic presuppositions of the Sophists and Jesuit colleges. Instead (s)he is the product of the more mature fruit of Modernity, of scientific pedagogy developed between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and of the spread of current mass education.

10 The Sophists were the first to think about the objectives related to the education of the individual. The teaching 'profession' with Prothagora became one which, as others, was to be remunerated based on its efficacy and usefulness thus, shedding the priestly and 'missionary' aura previously inhabited, see G. Seveso in R. Mantegazza, G. Seveso, *Pensare la scuola. Contraddizioni e interrogativi tra storia e quotidianità*, B. Mondadori, Milano 2006, p. 7.

11 W. Jaeger (1944), *Paideia. La formazione dell'uomo greco. L'età arcaica. Apogeo e crisi dello spirito attico*, op. cit. p. 511.

12 For an in-depth study of the role of the Jesuits in developing an organic system of education see F. Cambi, *Storia della pedagogia*, Laterza, Bari 1995, p. 210.

The application of the scientific method to pedagogical practice, although carried out in a tenuous and approximate form, has nevertheless enabled the development of an ideal of systematic, inter subjective and rigorous teaching which in a short period of time has managed to eclipse both the principle of the teacher's authority as a cultured and ethically exemplary reference-point, and the paradigmatic role of the canons, texts and authors to be drawn upon to education-train children and young people. The initial but vague concept of human nature which is so sensitive to racist, sexist and classist pedagogical drifts, is then replaced by that of psychological changes during development. The latter is destined, in a short space of time, to become an indispensable reference for the teacher so as to be able to organize a quality teaching-learning process. The competent teacher is thus one who is able to organize, design, evaluate, an education-training environment in which it is possible to create educational experiences capable of generating learning and skills, rather than simply 'transferring' notions or knowledge.

The primacy of education

From the point of view of the competent teacher, the main aims of school education are practical and utilitarian. They refer to the education-training skills that can be used in the productive system. If the cultural teacher is first and foremost an educator, the competent teacher tends to make a distinction between 'instruction' and 'education', relegating the latter only to the general aims of the education process. Within this perspective, the role of the contents of learning is completely instrumental to the processes of learning; school subjects are divided into units of teaching with reference to the processes of learning and the skills that they are to develop, while their educational and ethical roles are completely obscured and the primacy of the syllabus is replaced by that of programming. The formative value of the disciplines of study is traced back to the learning of the disciplinary structures, that is, of the fundamental concepts, of the specialized languages and of the research practices that characterize them individually. The structuralism and cognitivist didactics, proposed in particular by Bruner clearly represent the effort to connect cognitive development, organized in progressive stages with the epistemological structure of the disciplines. Even the teacher-pupil relationship, even if it is identified as fundamental for the effectiveness of teaching and has been studied down to the smallest communicative and emotional details, is reduced to a tool that can promote the processes of learning and only in part is envisioned as a common cross-cutting purpose to all learning in terms of socio-affective education. Didactics represents for the competent teacher a very important reference, even if it is reduced to an instrumental role with respect to the didactic objectives. It is up to didactic research to identify and define the repertoire of didactic activities that the teacher can draw on to solve the problems of everyday school life, from the planning of didactic activities to the management of the relationship with the students, to the assessment of the results one hopes to have achieved. The principle of technical rationality translates into the orientation to the quality of education, to its effectiveness and efficiency, but referred above all to the demands coming from systems outside the school, with particular attention to the needs of the production system. The competent teacher thus tends to develop in the learners knowledge, skills, and abilities that can be spent later in life as well as outside the educational system. The autonomy of the learner is idealized in his professional and social success, made possible by the capitalization of the skills learned in schooling. In this way the teacher realizes the contemporary Western pedagogical canon aimed at the economic realization of the individual within the production system¹³. In this perspective, school education reflects the needs of a society stratified according to professional functions rather than class membership of individuals.

A social organization that, while remaining pyramidal with the top occupied by the richest and most powerful groups and individuals still provides for a certain social mobility made possible by the level of education. If schooling can ensure the learning of exclusive skills required by the labour market, those who learn these can access higher levels of income than their family of origin. However, the path of social and economic ascent is strongly conditioned by the dynamics within the production and the financial systems. In periods of economic development, appreciable upward movements can occur, especially between the various segments of the so-called middle class; there is much less movement from these to the upper class. In times of recession or economic stagnation the mechanism freezes and can also provoke reverse social movements which are characterized by high rates of unemployment or underemployment accompanied by the risk of finding highly educated people employed in sectors which do not reflect their level of education in the workforce and which are unprofitable for the individual.

13 Within the Western model, the bourgeoisie model established itself in the modern pedagogical canon: learning the functions – be they minimal or empowered – of staying-on-the-market i.e. on how to be an active part in the division of money and power [...]. The dominant model is neither scientific nor medical, but responds to the normative criterion expressed by the financial economic market with its stock-exchange (metaphor) and GNP (metonym), and labour (rhetoric), see M. Gennari, *Per un 'canone' attuale della formazione*, in F. Cambi (a cura di), *Sul canone della pedagogia occidentale*, op. cit., p. 133.

The limits of the scientific approach to teaching

The risks and drifts of a scientific approach to schooling are numerous and the history of this approach clearly highlights them. Among the many to consider that concerning the question of the objective assessment of learners and the evaluation of schooling needs to be addressed.

The need to develop tools and methodologies capable of guaranteeing an objective and reliable evaluation of learning arises so as to reduce the interference of variables external to the teaching-learning process as much as possible including teacher prejudices or the inadequacy of traditional assessment tests and evaluation approaches developed and used in a totally subjective way by individual teachers. Since the end of the nineteenth and especially throughout the twentieth century, the criteria for constructing, applying and carrying out objective and standardized evaluation assessments have been established; these can be used in school contexts and their scientific nature is guaranteed above all by the use of statistical and mathematical data processing methods¹⁴. However, a critical analysis of the use of school learning assessment tests has shown that this approach can also induce a selection of pupils on the basis of their social, cultural and economic stratum e.g. the socio-cultural and/or economic stratum of society to which they belong. This evidence can be built on a model of the pupil or on a set of intellectual skills typical of individuals belonging to specific cultural contexts so as to reach the paradoxical case of a 'scientific' selection of pupils which is much more pernicious than the cultural one represented by the teacher-tutor since (s)he claims to be objective and beyond any contestation, even if this is not the case. The critical examples of the scientific approach to teaching underlying the model of the competent teacher are numerous and are not only related to the question of assessment but also to the choice of teaching criteria methods and how to relate to pupils. Think only of the positivist teaching methodologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries based on the analysis of objectives to be learned, meticulously broken down into their individual parts and mechanically proposed to the learning of children and young people, or of the most recent behavioural approaches for the management of learning difficulties and behaviour, also based on the fractioning of learning and desirable behaviour, together with those wishing to abolish minimal units in order to design teaching-sequences based on the sequence stimulus, response, reinforcement.

What is important to highlight is the ambiguity of the results and methodologies of scientific didactic research which can also convey prejudices and ideologies capable of transforming the didactic event into a form of education-training conditioning on a par with spontaneous and individual approaches. These dangers, however, do not lessen the importance of a scientific approach to teaching-learning processes; they simply warn us not to reduce it to a simple reservoir of tools from which to draw in case of need. It is much more important to develop a scientific didactic attitude, based on the willingness to submit individual problems to systematic investigation and to confront oneself with experiences and proposals which emerge in similar contexts avoiding to limit oneself to applying tools and methods conventionally considered as objective but which are inadequate with respect to the singularities that characterize each didactic event. The latter is the perspective advocated by Dewey when he states that: "[...] laws and the same facts, even when they are obtained in an authentically scientific form, do not provide practical rules. Their value for the practice of education [...] is an indirect value; it consists in providing the intellectual tools that will be used by the educator [...] That is, they guide his attention, both in observation and in reflection, towards conditions and relationships that would otherwise go unnoticed. If we are to use the word 'rule' we must say that scientific results provide a rule on how to conduct observations and research, and not a rule for open action"¹⁵.

The conscious or aware teacher and its focus on critical reflection

This conscious or aware teacher model is perhaps the one currently most studied by some areas of pedagogical-didactic research, yet even in this case we cannot fail to point out the links it has with classical Greek culture and, while, for the cultural teacher we referred to the Homeric epic, and for the competent teacher we recalled the Sophists, in this case we must refer to Socrates who was among the first to problematize the question of the educational relationship, or to ask who can be educated, how and why¹⁶. Even if the scope of Socratic reflections is obviously conditioned by the socio-political context of classical Greece, its sensitivity towards an education no longer reserved for aristocrats, towards a methodology that does not consider the learner as an empty vessel to be filled, but towards the need to direct training

14 For a history of assessment practices in schooling see, B. Vertecchi, *Origini e sviluppi della docimologia*, Giunti e Lisciani, Teramo 1991.

15 J. Dewey (1929), *Le fonti di una scienza dell'educazione*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1990, pp. 19/21.

16 The Socratic teacher-model focuses on the awareness of not-knowing all and of a learning-facilitator in a relationship which has close links with the ethical aspects of teaching. For Socrates, the teacher is one who is continuously in search with his students but who refuses to dispense knowledge on a pay-as-you-go model, see G. Seveso in R. Mantegazza, G. Seveso, *Pensare la scuola. Contraddizioni e interrogativi tra storia e quotidianità*, op. cit., p. 8.

towards the common good and not only towards personal fulfillment, is undeniable.

Autonomy of the learner and the social desirability of learning In the present revival of these issues, the reference to reflectivity emerges strongly, but here we prefer to deal with awareness to mark the link between the conscious teacher, progressive pedagogy and critical didactics. This is because it is preferable to proceed from a starting point beyond professional reflectivity in general, of which we recognize the importance for the purposes of our discourse¹⁷.

The conscious teacher puts the pedagogical principles of authority and technical rationality before those of critical reflexivity; moreover, even before asking himself what and how to teach, he asks himself why to teach. The implicit answers provided by the two previous models do not seem exhaustive. Teaching to transmit culture or to develop professional skills does not satisfy the need to guarantee, on the one hand, the autonomy of the individual in training, which cannot be reduced exclusively to the learning of cultural canons and behavior developed by previous generations. On the other hand, the social desirability of learning is not limited only to the training of professional skills that can be spent in the labor market. Both approaches to the question require particular reflective attention.

The autonomy of the learner is achieved when the learner becomes aware of the links of dependency that bind him to the physical and social environment to which he belongs, the dependence on parents, teachers, employers, technology, etc.. Personal autonomy is therefore synonymous with awareness of dependence on other subjects and is the necessary condition for such dependencies to translate into opportunities for growth, maturation, choice, weakening of the same dependencies, while the unawareness of these links exacerbates the effect by conditioning, introducing repression, and homologizing. The social desirability of the learning and behaviour developed in the training course, on the other hand, concerns the need to orient the spaces of autonomy conquered by the conscious individual not only towards personal and individualistic realization, but also towards a convinced and sincere commitment to the construction of a just, non-violent, rational and non-obtrusive society.

Conformity and individualism in the formation of contemporary man

From the point of view of critical pedagogy and conscious didactics, conformism and individualism are the two extreme training poles to be avoided. Conformism arises from the annihilation of the individual under the weight of social demands, through fear and/or early conditioning. Individualism derives from an exaltation of disproportionate competition as the only norm to regulate social relations and from an exasperation of cognitive and relational egocentricity. Both conformism and individualism prevent the formation of autonomous, critical, reflexive and conscious personalities. However, in contemporary social contexts, conformism and individualism represent two behavioural models strongly induced by the cultural industry which, on the one hand, exalts the myth of personal achievement through an incessant reference to physical perfection, economic success, possession of goods and objects, while on the other hand, it subjects to a pervasive and continuous homologating action, imposing mass behavioral models in all areas of social life, from clothing to cosmetics, from furniture to food¹⁸. The contemporary teacher is thus faced with children and young people, most of whom were already trained by early and intensive exposure to the messages of the cultural industry and mass consumption. These are children and young people who have already developed a vast repertoire of conformist behaviour in the use and consumption of cultural objects and products and are at the same time characterized by a persistent egocentricity which manifests itself in the difficulty of adhering to the rules of school life, in the tendency to competition, in the difficulty to accept help from the adult, in the indifference to the problems of the other, in the denial of the inevitable frustrations in case of failure or transitory difficulties that may occur in situations of growth and education-training. The result of consumerism training is manifested in adults who are completely indifferent to the fate of the social community, distracted spectators of recurrent environmental and economic emergencies which affect large sectors of the world's population, all consumed by the implementation of their own life projects to the point of neglecting even the social relationships of proximity, from good neighborly care to parental care for the elderly, children, and people in need¹⁹.

The function of the conscious or aware teacher

17 Reflection as pedagogy and as critical pedagogy which shapes education-training. Indeed, reflection returns again and again to knowledge and knowing and continuously refines them especially in terms of the ultimate objectives; it interconnects knowing and contexts in the act of education, see F. Cambi, *Odissea scuola. Un cammino ancora incompiuto*, Loffredo Editore, Napoli 2008, p. 165.

18 cfr., A. Honnet, *Capitalismo e riconoscimento*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2011, a collection of essays edited by M. Solinas, in which Honnet illustrates the relations which exist between current Capitalist productive organization and the social and intrapsychic dynamics which regulate the behaviour of contemporary mankind *ibidem* p. 53.

19 On these effects see how S. Ironico concludes an experimental research which centres on the analysis of the manner in which children become consumers in S. Ironico, *Come i bambini diventano consumatori*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2010, p. 138.

Through a critical reflection on the contemporary social, cultural and economic situation here-mentioned, the conscious or aware teacher matures intellectual tools capable of facilitating the understanding of pupil behaviors, the choice of the long-term educational objectives to be pursued, the operative modalities by means of which to achieve these objectives. In this way, we witness a reversal of the approach to education-training and didactics that we first saw in the previous models of teachers given that the conscious teacher does not take his role and function for granted, but reconnects them to the broader physical and social context(s) of which he is part²⁰, in an attempt to grasp the historicity of the processes of teaching-learning which can serve different purposes, take on particular forms, take certain directions, depending on the historical context in which they exist.

At the same time, the individual in education-training to whom the teaching is addressed, is not considered simply as the final recipient of schooling, to be educated-trained on the basis of the needs coming from systems which are external to the education-training systems or on the basis of those considered important by individual teachers. Rather, it is recognized as a subject bearer of inalienable rights, and since it is an individual in evolutionary age, in part unable to recognize and defend its rights, it needs more attention and guarantees. The function of the conscious teacher is therefore that of favouring the emancipation of the subject in education-training, his liberation from any cultural conditioning that directs him towards conformism. For this reason, the conscious teacher gaze and attention pass continuously and alternately from the social context to the didactic one, from the community to the school community, from the class group to the individual pupil, precisely because he is aware that between these extremes there is continuity rather than opposition. Focusing on one of the two poles alone or too much, inhibits understanding of the links that connect the didactic experiences with the other life experiences of the pupils, and it is precisely these links that allow useless or, even worse, harmful didactic experiences, to be elaborated.

An active, constructivist, metacognitive, cooperative didactic approach

From the point of view of the conscious or aware teacher, the primacy of indirect didactics emerges, interpreted as the ability to design an education-training environment side by side with that of active and constructivist, metacognitive and cooperative didactics. The latter can be interpreted as the expressions of the didactic intention to favour not only the individual transmission of notions, knowledge and skills to subjects separated from each other and detached from the context in which they are formed. The basic pedagogical idea is to encourage the active and autonomous construction of knowledge and skills with a view to the education-training of an individual aware of what he learns and especially willing to share what he learns with the education-training group of which he is part. This perspective is based on the idea that human learning, from the first months of life to adulthood, does not represent a simple absorption and a consequent duplication of stimuli from the outside, nor a process of executing innate faculties already present in the subject, as the empirical and rationalist hypotheses respectively support, but rather a process of construction based on mental operations and actions that the subject activates in interactions with the physical and social environment to which it belongs. The subject in education-training builds increasingly complex and sophisticated cognitive structures in relation to the possibilities of action he has with environmental stimuli, such as intelligence motor sense, which matures through the composition and coordination of progressive motor patterns from isolated actions, grasping, shaking, throwing, until one reaches complex action plans, grasping to throw, shaking to listen to a noise, etc.. The same principle applies to more complex learning, when the coordination of individual actions is replaced by the coordination of concepts, propositions, knowledge, through intellectual operations that from time to time the individual who is active in the relationship with certain cultural objects, called subjects or disciplines in the school lexicon.

This progressive ability to coordinate schemes of action or concepts or propositions, is never the result of individual actions. Rather, it is always the result of social interactions, since the motor-intelligence sense is the mother-child interaction that allows cognitive progress. Likewise, the subsequent socio-cognitive conflicts with individuals who do not belong to the parental environment in the actions to determine the overcoming of cognitive and relational egocentricity of the child are important. There is no separation between cognitive and relational processes; the mind of the child also develops in relation to the complexity of the social relationships in which it participates, and the opportunities for coordination and sharing of points of view, emotions, experiences that he is given to experience. It is in this dense web of cognitive and social elements that the ethical principle of cooperation is realized; the latter cannot be reduced to mere practice to facilitate individual learning at certain times of didactic work, but must represent the constant background of schooling.

20 For the Constructivists, knowledge and knowing are the result of *actions* carried out by the *active participant*. Because they are not manipulations of things, the action which builds knowledge is seen as operation and it is this Piaget-like subjective cognitive operation which organizes the individual and his world of experience, see B.M. Varisco, *Costruttivismo socio-radiale. Genesi filosofiche, sviluppi psico-pedagogici, applicazioni didattiche*, Carocci, Roma 2002, p.42.

Cooperation between pupils in a class, school, community cannot be desired only because it allows cognitive maturation; rather, it is the basis, the basic prerequisite for the education-training of 'affective' individuals, that is, attentive to the needs of others, willing to mute and help relationships, sensitive to dialogue and sharing. In this perspective we can speak of social constructivism, that is, of a didactic approach that recognizes in the education-training process the indissoluble link between individual and social aspects, cognitive and emotional elements, the maturation of autonomy and the development of solidarity. In this complex process of knowledge construction, the possibility and the ability of the individual to control and monitor their own learning processes is particularly important.

Learning generates education i.e. knowing based on knowledge and rational and desirable behaviours, only if one is aware, otherwise it is conditioning, training, annihilation of the learning subject. What have I learned, how and why? These are the fundamental questions that a conscious subject asks himself when faced with his own learning. These are questions to which the conscious teacher does not renounce, on the contrary he encourages them and poses them at the basis of the entire teaching-learning process. Sharing the choice of contents and didactic methods with colleagues and with the students through the practice of the education-training contract and of the collegial action, promoting individual and group monitoring of the didactic activities, realizing a metacognitive didactic approach, encouraging the awareness of the results achieved through the practice of the self-evaluation, are all parts of the learning process. Indirect and constructive teaching is thus transformed into reflective and critical teaching which focuses on the need to promote autonomy and awareness of the learner, and since we know that neither autonomy nor awareness can be taught directly we return to the starting-point i.e. The conscious teacher aims first of all to build educational environments that allow the individual to learn thanks to the support offered by the adult and other students in a relationship with cultural objects which are significant and accessible to the individual through active, interactive and constructive educational paths within which there are also moments of self-evaluation and monitoring that can allow the subject in education-training to grasp the meaning, importance, and direction of what (s)he learns. From this perspective there is no room for an assessment intended as a value judgment on the students or as a tool to select the best students. Assessment is a didactic tool that informs teachers on the progress of educational activities, helps students to understand the causes of success and difficulties, and contributes to the education-training and development of an authentic relationship with parents.

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