

Extrait du School forging new paths

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Armen Tarpinian

Politics and school. The anthropological dimension

- English - Human and Educative aims -

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School forging new paths

"Why is it that schools fail to provide all children with equal opportunities to stimulate their desire to learn, to develop their humanity?" Encouraging field experiences do exist, though; statements in favor of a society project that endeavors to assure a true psychosocial and humanist education.

School achievement and human achievement

Given the promises and threats from Modernity, can't the pertinent politics and education suggest which vision of a human being we are tending to? Issues such as family, school, society, political action and evolution are undoubtedly connected. Any learning that is good for school is also good for life: learning to learn, learning to do, learning to know yourself, learning to live in harmony with others. These four roads of humanizing education, in the full sense of the word, defined by UNESCO, to which the ecological road is added today, should be the structure and matter of all sorts of education from the age of seven to the age of seventy-seven...

The word "humanizing" is here related to the evolutionary process that can lead us - individually and collectively - from learning and not exhortations or "hell is full of good intentions", to the development of human maturity, that is, the quality of the bond in all its shades, going from cordiality and tolerance to friendship and love; the clarity of spirit which is knowledge in itself and judgment strength without prejudices; autonomy and solidarity, which are vitally supplementary. This requires forms of education, of self-education and of coeducation, without which humanism becomes a rather unsafe road.

What needs to be forcefully stated is that field experiences, roads of actions and instruments do exist, but they remain profoundly ignored or unknown. Despite being essential for human achievement, knowledge and learning such as self-knowledge, listening capacity, empathy, sense of dialog, capacity to cooperate, critical and self-criticism spirit, or even the capacity to put emotions and motivations into words, relating with others unsubmitively or uncontrollingly, not letting resentment and conflict turn into violence, are not included in the school program. Why not? Isn't ignoring this mental education - emotional, relational, introspective, here called psychosocial - at least as serious as forgetting to teach physical education? This is something learned. However, despite the Recommendations by the High Council of Education about primary schooling (2006), the institution fails to give this psychosocial education a concrete place, even though this "real road" is critical to the fulfillment of both of the school's missions, which are intricately connected: training and education, or even, transmitting and upbringing.

The decisive politicians, like everyone else, are scarcely aware of this dimension and find it difficult to truly grasp the profound nature of the school's uneasiness. Thus, they are understandably worried, for instance, about issues such as order and security, and most of them remain distant from the approaches provided by the human sciences to the hypersensitive issue of authority, to its actual sense and to its exercising conditions (cf. «Towards an educational authority», collective work, Véronique Guérin [\[1\]](#)).

School and Society

The responsibility to re-think the principles, values and forms of actions through which society may or may not favor the development of the above-mentioned existential qualities is incumbent not only upon the school but upon society as a whole. Therefore, what would like to be found within the basis of alternative politics is:

An ecological and anthropological vision based on a better understanding of the humanizing process, that is to say,

the species' process of mental and emotional growing;

a psychological vision connected to people's maturity, nourished by the knowledge of human and social sciences accumulated for over a century (including psycho-therapeutic culture, ethology, neurosciences, etc.) ;

a vision of social living, with a better foundation on those sciences, which may allow for innovative and fruitful teachings of a "better life in harmony with others".

However, other than ecology - since the fear of foretold catastrophes forces us to take it into account, though not without difficulties -, none of these vital perspectives have made their way into political proposals: psychosocial education is far from being a priority at school and in society. It is neither identified nor acknowledged or "idolized" like the other forms of knowledge; in France, specifically, where what prevails is the "intelligence quotient" (IQ) even though what is actually designated, as a paraphrase, is the "relational quotient" (RQ), appropriate teachings are sought (Olivier Clerc, "Developing the relational quotient: a program for the millennium" [1]). However, wouldn't their inclusion be an integral part of professional training, where people relations take up a key place? Educators, social workers, doctors and paramedics (Édouard Zarifian deplored, not long ago, the fact that relational qualities are not taken into account when selecting or certifying future medical doctors, who receive - surprisingly, at best - a few hours of instruction in medical psychology during their course of studies), but also professionals in the justice system, in the police, in the penitentiary system (where it is true that such training have begun to be officially implemented recently).

Isn't it imperative, in the case of professionals who provide services to people, called accompanying professionals, for this to be massively developed? This increase in professionalization would do them such credit as they deserve, making them more attractive. The increase might undoubtedly contribute to partly solve the employment problem. When will there be psychosocial training at France's National Management School (ENA by its initials in French) and other Great Schools? What is unbelievable is that the students of psychology are not specifically trained in this, University of Paris X emeritus professor Edmond Marc remarks (« Les enseignants face la psychologie » [Educators facing psychology] [1]).

However, experience shows that this training can be implemented at school, which we all attend, from the very beginning till college. This would have a significant impact on the prevention of the great deviations of the human spirit such as both religious and ideological fundamentalism or fanaticism; or the tendency to project their fears and their responsibility upon scapegoats; or xenophobia and, what is even worse, racism, which is related to pure psychopathology. These deviations affect both educated and uneducated people.

The task of the school is to introduce students to the complexity of what is real, to teach them to be more open to questions than to dogmatic certainties. They should even be trained more in the history and spirit of science's creative doubt than in technical applications. Isn't the spirit of curiosity what favors young people's maturity best, what assures old people's youth as well? (Edgar Morin, « Mieux répondre à la curiosité de l'enfant » [A better response to the child's curiosity] [1]).

The fundamental contradiction

Without questioning the positive investment of school employees, what should be mainly rethought is the deep, insidious contradiction that exists between the invoked republican values and the values actually transmitted, since at school, just like in society, excellence rises above the capacity to surpass others but not above the constructive emulation in the face of the knowledge or competences to be acquired, particularly those of cooperation, team work,

positive exchange of knowledge and know-how. Therefore, the plea for "equal opportunities" turns out to be a short-range ethical and practical resource in our system of unbridled competition.

In an outstanding analysis, François Dubet provided a precise description of this system's evil effects (Le Monde, December 1 2009). The equality of opportunities "saves" some, but the good conscience raised by this leads to evading the real question: why can't the school provide each and every child with equal opportunities to stimulate their desire to learn, to display their humanity? Though far from being the only reason, the school would have to be more perceptive, take part of the responsibility and make a positive intervention.

The school, which is supposed to be a happy, studious walk around the forest of knowledge, as well as a wide road to learn autonomy and social bonds, has become a race in which the students - incited to compare themselves obsessively - either silently or noisily turn into rivals (cf. Désorientation de l'enfant face au jeu et au travail, in *Vivre s'apprend...* [Disorientation of the child in the face of playing and working; in *Living you learn...*] [2]). Posing questions as to whether there is any coherence within a school system in which, in this uncertain race, even the best adapted feel pressured to take specific courses to guarantee their achievements may be healthy.

Those students weakened by socioeconomic and cultural "disabilities" are naturally more exposed to the evil effects of such an aberrant system of winners-losers. But even if there are more of them, losers are not only in "the burning peripheries"; they come from all social classes. It is understood, then, that the "unique school" will continue to be one of those good intentions which abound in hell, as long as the school keeps working according to this counter ethic, which is truly anti-republican. This lack of psychosocial dimension in teachers' education can partly explain their discomfort about facing the difficulty to respond to the massive democratization of a school that continues to work globally according to the criteria and values of a system in which only 5% of the students had access to the last years of secondary school. Many teachers are aware of this, provide themselves with education and take advantage of it. Some experiences have multiplied themselves but disappeared due to lack of official instances which may take responsibility for them. Teachers' suffering at school and their risk of depression are greater than in private or semi-public businesses, even though employment is guaranteed a priori.

Whether acknowledged or not, the school is - for better or for worse - mother and daughter of society and its values. It would be useful for the school to explain, in detail, how it stimulates or reduces the students' potential; why - thanks to the empathy of this or that adult - some extremely vulnerable students regain their self-esteem and their confidence in their own intellectual capacities. (Jacques Lecomte, « Les enseignants : tuteurs potentiels de résilience » [Teachers: potential resilience tutors] [1]).

Analyzing the problems from this essential viewpoint allows for a deep and complex approximation to the reasons why school failures and even a better understanding of success conditions in the full sense of the word, may actually occur [1]. These conditions, which would be extremely preventive, are still profoundly ignored...

Towards a humanizing education

Within a general orientation centered around human development and in relation to school, at least eight measures, whose psycho-pedagogical efficacy has been widely verified, could be recommended. It should also be pointed out that they would not entail high supplementary costs since they are mostly qualitative.

1) Developing an aptitude for cooperation and "team work" both in adults and in the students. Guaranteeing appropriate learning.

- 2) Introducing school personnel to children and adolescent psychology, supplemented by teacher and student psychology. Educating them in group dynamics, group-class dynamics specifically.
- 3) Promoting an analysis of professional practices (sharing experiences in groups helps to get free from the damages caused by the teacher's "splendid isolation" [3]).
- 4) Progressively giving up stigmatizing - more or less arbitrary - forms of evaluation which weaken children's confidence in their capacities and in their self-sufficiency, exacerbate the spirit of competition - under their parents' anxious eyes - and thus distort the reasons and desire to learn, in favor of innovative and self-making forms of evaluation.
- 5) Giving errors a positive status in learning and training processes: freeing them from the fault phobia. This would consist in a true mental and cultural revolution which would mark the passage from an intimidating to a reliable, stimulating pedagogy. Some teachers work this way, but the system's archaic ways continues to be decisive. (Daniel Favre « L'erreur et la faute » [« Error and fault »] [1]). According to Europe's PISA survey, mentioned below, young French people are the most "inhibited" students in terms of their expression capacities.
- 6) Applying the official instructions from the 1989 Reform, related to basic learning, in terms of maturity cycles and not according to age, which would avoid the evil effect of trying to make children aged five and six (some born in January and others in December of the same year) move forward at the same pace. This undoubtedly has to do with an element that is more decisive as regards school difficulties and failures than this or that learning method.
- 7) Guaranteeing an education in "mediation and conflict resolution" both for students and adults. This would enable the development of a culture of dialog and peace; that this not be a wish but everyday learning. The law that would establish children's right to non-violence could never be separate from children's right to have a non-violence oriented education.
- 8) Enriching the civic education period by means of experimented upon psychosocial educational practices which may favor spirit maturity and a feeling of democratic co-responsibility (cf. especially, the effective Socio-psychoanalytical or Socio-therapeutic approaches, within the collectively authored work: Claire Rueff-Escoubès and Charles Rojzman [1]).

It is worth noting that there are very valuable education and training psychosocial programs. Let us remember, for instance, the Program for the school of French Coordination for a culture of peace and non violence, www.ecole-nonviolence.org. Several theoretical and practical guidelines can be found at the end of the chapters in the collectively authored work entitled *École : changer de cap* [School: changing directions] [1] as well as in the Guide des ressources [Guide of resources], www.nonviolence-actualite.org, or in Georges Hervé's website, <http://assoreveil.org>, and Jacques Nimier, *Les facteurs humains dans l'enseignement et la formation d'adultes* [Human factors in teaching and training adults], www.PedagoPsy.eu, etc. Many of those psychosocial education instruments may find their natural places within the Groups of public educational institutions (GRETA by its acronym in French) which groups the resources of those establishments, the teachers and the equipment, and which organize adults' continuing education actions, www.education.gouv.fr.

Fundamental answers

Without underestimating the complexity of all the factors in play, the application (though not thorough) of such basic measures - each of which has been confirmed - could cause deep systemic effects both on representations and on values and behaviors which are implicitly induced and transmitted. They would contribute to re-motivate the students: to avoid boredom, lack of interest, "disconnection", even the failure spirals whose spectacular consequences are well

known, though not so much the private suffering that tends to leave a life-long mark. In order to ease the classroom climate, these measures would save on energy and make up for the time wasted in trying to get the students' attention. They would consist in fundamental answers to violence and authority related problems. They would tend to spread naturally through the social body, to enrich political behaviors and to become part - in the long run - of an ethics and of citizens' practices.

The Nordic countries, which are often quoted as models and in which human and school achievements are implicitly linked and "every child matters", get the best results in Europe. It should be pointed out that in Finland, which is at the top of the list of European countries, there is no mark in the sense that we are familiar with, not before the beginning of the fifth year. Of course this measure has positive lasting effects, but only if a more general ethical and pedagogical of the school system is carried out. In any case, we could hope that the educational world and the decision-making politicians will "work" on those results (Henri Charpentier, «Systèmes scolaires et équité sociale» ["School systems and social equity" [1]).

Such a commitment would allow for a new school to fully integrate the anthropological dimension, which calls for an education in which knowledge, know how, know how to be and know how to live in harmony are learned altogether, and the ecological dimension, which requires an economic development that seems to oppose performance at all costs, blind to its consequences. From this more humanizing point of view, the Seven existential knowledges identified by Edgar Morin offer extremely valuable, unavoidable paths for the future [4].

Far from being idealized, the Nordic examples show that, rather than being in front of a utopia, we are facing a possible cultural and social evolution: a project for a society in more authentic agreement with the humanizing process, which can insufflate more soul, greater sense and consistence into the republican ideal and into political action. Only a systematic understanding of the group of interpersonal, social and political interactions will cause significant changes of direction. It is long-term thinking and working that best enables us to create answers in the present for current expectations and sufferings.

Good news

A century ago, Péguy wrote that "the crises in education are not educational crises but rather life crises". Extending his great insight, we could state today that the crisis at school, the ecological crisis and the economic crisis (with their vast social inequalities corrected on one side and seriously widened on another) have ethical and anthropological roots in common: the species' immaturity in front of their exceptional and fragile destiny, as well as their miscalculations during their vital search for satisfaction, according to Paul Diel [5].

This is proved by the thousands of millions of euros destined in 2008 by the international society to military expenses and their powerlessness to mobilize the hundred thousand million of euros per year that would allow to solve in just a few years' time the world's water problem and to eradicate hunger and child mortality, scandalously associated with extreme poverty and lack of care [6].

Patrick Viveret, cofounder of "Dialogs in Humanity", cannot help but remember that humanity's inhumanity has become the central problem in politics [7]. In the midst of the exponential progress made by the techniques, which rightly dazzle us but whose applications are still partly loaded with current or potential damages, and of the slow steps taken by our clarity and wisdom, then isn't the contrast extremely worrying? However, regardless of the fears - or even the infinite angst - that this causes in us, the only way we can positively find a basis for our hope and our actions will be through the concrete mobilization of theoretical knowledge and of the key practical advantages we possess. Humanism can only be re-founded upon a real change in how we see ourselves and how we see the world.

Thus we will understand why Michelet pointed out, in a voluntarily reductionist way, that the most important part of politics is education. What about the second most important part?, she wondered. Education. And the third? Education. Nowadays we would call this a Politics and a School inhabited by the same project, the same humanization worry. The good news, I insist, is that we know how we could move forward - along this inconceivable emergency adventure of the thinking species, a little more safely along the steep roads of evolution [8]. Will we ever have the time to do this?

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Armen Tarpinian, director of the Magazine of Motivation Psychology (1986-2008), co-founder of the Personal Transformation - Social Transformation Project.

has co-directed these collective works: *Être Psychothérapeute. Questions, pratiques, enjeux* (Dunod, 2005) [Being a therapist. Issues, practices, challenges];

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