

CHAPTER SIX

RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS DIVERSITY: AN EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF DEMOCRACY

ROBERTO FRANZINI TIBALDEO

Even at a first glance, the past decades have been of extraordinary importance for the comprehension of difficulties related to the accommodation of ethnic and religious diversity, both at the European and at the global level. Public opinion, politicians, and scholars in many countries have levelled criticisms against multiculturalism for being unable to provide satisfactory policies on social cohesion and the governance of ethnic and religious diversity (Jura, 2012). Others, however, prefer not to abandon multiculturalism in spite of its faults, and argue for its expansion (Parekh, 2000; Vasta, 2007; Kymlika, 2007; Silj, 2010; Taylor, 2012). To some extent, the alleged ineffectiveness of multiculturalism highlights a deeper problem: since the 1990s (war in the former Yugoslavia), and especially since the beginning of the new millennium (11 September 2001 in the USA, but also 7 July 2005, 7 January 2015, and 13 November 2015 in Europe), a growing fear of the so-called “clash of civilizations” has spread all over the globe. According to this trend, ethnic and religious diversities and traditions are perceived as menaces to the *status quo* and therefore trigger problematic reactions: first, the social group’s enclosure within the defensive barriers of static identities, which are often created *ex nihilo* and manipulated for political purposes; and, second, the tendency of the members of a dominant group not to recognize the “other” and his or her equal in rights – i.e. a tendency which in some cases ends in the adoption of assimilationist policies (Greblo, 2013).

In addition, the current global economic crisis has given people and politicians of several developed European and Western countries an excuse to engage in further defensive processes: all who are perceived to some extent as “different” or “outsiders” are likely to suffer various forms

of discrimination, and are in many ways excluded from the alleged community of the “self,” which has no intention of giving up its privileges for any reason. Therefore, we are witnessing an additional threat to society: the “us vs. them” conflict discriminates against the weakest members of society and the so-called “minorities within minorities”, that is – generally speaking – the women, the young, and the immigrants (Ambrosini, 2005; Eisenberg, Spinner, & Halev, 2005). As a result, our epoch seems to be afflicted with a series of problems, such as the spread of stereotypes, social prejudice, and discrimination; an increasing lack of faith in forthcoming opportunities; a generalized breakdown of critical and reflective thinking; and a pervasive mistrust of democracy (Bobbio, 1988; Appadurai, 1996; Galli, 2011; Magatti, 2012; Pulcini, 2013).

The Focus on Intercultural Competence at School

Of course, among the aspects directly involved in this landscape, the issue of education plays an important role, especially in the current multicultural and/or intercultural societies. However – as often happens – the relevance of education is largely underestimated or even ignored in too many Western and European countries. As a consequence, educational methods, strategies, and practices appear not to be as effective as expected at facing the above-mentioned challenges – that is, at enhancing critical thinking and social integration, at offering job opportunities, and at educating reflective democratic citizens (see, among others, Torres, 2009; Nussbaum, 2010; Grant & Portera, 2011; Nowak, 2013; Nowak et al., 2013).

To be sure, the criticism of traditional education’s incapacity to be abreast of the contemporary situation and to understand the signs of the times is nothing new (see, for instance, John Dewey’s (1916) reflections on this matter or the educational reform already invoked in the USA by Matthew Lipman (2003) together with Ann M. Sharp at the end of the 1970s). However, the present context is quite different, due to factors such as globalization, social and cultural complexity, and the current trends in international migration (Gobbo, 2000; Portera, 2006; Portera et al., 2007; Bauman & Mazzeo, 2012). Western culture has been forced to put aside the presumption of being the centre of the world, and is currently undergoing a thorough revision of particular widespread yet problematic attitudes, such as the uncritical acceptance of mainstream opinions and the hindrance of “methodological nationalism” (Beck 2006, 24 ff.). These circumstances also affect education, which is forced to review its overall aims and develop new pedagogical methods and practices in order to

reconnect itself with what is happening in the world and eventually restore its formative, leading, and propulsive role in society (Portera 2003b, pp. 22–23).

Among the new challenges to be addressed, the issue of dealing with the pluralism and diversity of values, cultures, religions, etc., is certainly of the greatest importance (and, of course, one of the most debated – as evidenced by Turgeon (2004, pp. 102–104), who provides an interesting outline of the recent “curriculum wars” over the educational “canon”). To be sure, “diversity” is no newcomer in contemporary society, and several forms of diversity have been didactically and pedagogically dealt with in various ways in recent decades, especially in schools, including: disabilities; economic, social, and cultural differences; differences concerning race, gender, and sexual orientation, etc. Therefore, theoretically speaking, the specific form of “diversity” only recently generated by the stream of global migration adds but only another item to the list of “intercultural” issues (Gobbo, 2000, 46 ff., 89 ff.; Portera 2003b, p. 25; Rey & von Allmen 2003, pp. 36–37; Turgeon 2004, p. 97). Still, it is an item that makes a difference, as it is connected with a wide range of social and political challenges, which at the present moment are far from being successfully handled by social and educational institutions.

In this respect, my aim is to undertake an interdisciplinary inquiry into *diversity* within educational contexts, in order to highlight innovative and effective ways of enhancing intercultural competences. The aim is to successfully deal with the plurality of existing *diversities*, which are to be considered not as threats, but, on the contrary, as opportunities for the development of individual and social self-awareness, maturity, and education. Such an analysis can reap great benefit from the *mare magnum* of existing projects, experiences, and best practices. In particular, I wish to mention recent research projects, such as Accept Pluralism at the European University Institute – Robert Schumann Centre for Advanced Studies (see <http://www.accept-pluralism.eu>); the International and European Normative Framework (see UNESCO, 2001; COE, 2004; UNESCO, 2005; COE, 2008; as well Keast, 2007), and other national and regional laws or statements of best practice, such as the Region of Tuscany’s decree D.R. 530/2008, *Per una scuola antirazzista e dell’inclusione* (For a Non-Racist and Inclusive School), and its related projects: *La scuola di tutti: Pluralismo, intercultura, inclusione, diritti* (Everybody’s School: Pluralism, Interculturality, Inclusion, Rights, 2010–2012) and *A scuola di diversità: Pluralismo, intercultura, inclusione, diritti* (Learning from Diversity: Pluralism, Interculturality, Inclusion, Rights, 2012–2014, see www.ascuoladidiversita.it).

Philosophical Inquiry and Interculturality

The issue of intercultural education and the development of intercultural competence at school can greatly benefit – this, at least, is the core idea I wish to argue – from philosophy, and specifically from the social practice of philosophical dialogue and critical reflection. As we shall see, this experience is of extreme importance for the enhancement of mutual respect, tolerance, reciprocal understanding, a sense of belonging, empathy, etc. – that is, the most relevant virtues and ethical values upon which any attempt at appreciating diversities and acknowledging their worth ultimately rests (see among others Taylor 1994; Gutmann, 1994; Rovatti, 2007).

Among other philosophical practices, I wish to draw specific attention to Matthew Lipman's *philosophy for children/community* (P4C), which emphasizes two interesting aspects: on the one hand, the multidimensionality of creative, critical, and *caring thinking*; and, on the other hand, the importance of thinking-with-others, i.e. of a community of inquiry (Lipman, 1995; Lipman, 2003).

Lipman's thinking begins with a negative experience: in the 1960s, while teaching philosophy to college students and adult education students, he witnessed the failure of traditional education to promote the ideal of reasonableness (Lipman, 1995) and to effectively instil civil virtues (Lipman, 2003). Therefore, Lipman went in search of a new philosophical and pedagogical paradigm, so as to comprehend the overall formation of the individual's dispositions, along with the main features of the democratic citizen.

Indeed, education and democracy ought not be separated. This idea Lipman borrows directly from Dewey (Dewey, 1916). Like Dewey, Lipman believes that the democracy is simultaneously the foundation and the goal of an ideal education system, the aim of which is to stimulate the spread of reflection, autonomy, and critical thinking. Moreover, the aim is to give rise to dialogue, self-correction, and inquiry, in order to eliminate the forces which cause violence, ignorance, injustice, and the spread of stereotypes and prejudice. Democracy is, according to Lipman, the social and political environment where human relations take place, and where – I wish to add – human diversities and their “contradictory certainties” ought to peacefully compete within an atmosphere of mutual respect in order to construct common experiences, enterprises, and new forms of culture (Beck, 2006; Lam, 2013). Indeed, as Ulrich Beck states, we live in “a world in which it has become necessary to understand, reflect, and

criticize difference, and in this way to assert and recognize oneself and others as different and hence of equal value” (Beck, 2006, p. 89).

This approach is, however, incomplete without an indication of the extent to which philosophy plays a relevant role. Lipman refers to an idea of philosophy as a *philosophical practice*, and not as a mere exercise of theoretical and abstract knowledge. In keeping with this, Lipman defines thinking as a synonym for (philosophical) inquiry, and sees it as something that has to be understood to mean perseverance in self-corrective investigation regarding relevant and problematic questions (Lipman, 1995).

A “Community of (philosophical) Inquiry” (CI) – which is, by the way, an embodiment of “democracy” – originates from a common desire to participate in a dialogue, whose tangible shape is the circle formed by the participants and whose steps are *reading*, *questioning*, and *discussing* (Lipman, 2003, pp. 97–100). Participants (normally from 13 to 15-20 per session) are reciprocally committed “to reasonableness – that is, to rationality tempered by judgement” (Lipman, 2003, p. 111). In other words, they are committed to undertaking a broad reflection upon their respective ways of thinking. To some extent, such inquiry is a practical experience in which each member contributes the perspective that arises from his or her own values in an attempt to come to a productive result. The community reflection works as a device which opens the possibility for negotiation, mutual understanding, translation, social inclusion, and, ultimately, as a practice of reciprocal recognition and respect, self-regulation, and reframing of ideas and perspectives – that is the practice of democracy. As a result, such philosophical inquiry fosters the cohesion of the community, which becomes “increasingly sensitive to meaningful nuances of contextual differences” (Lipman, 2003, p. 102).

The heart and vehicle of expression of the inquiry is, according to Lipman, philosophical dialogue, which differs from conversation, debate, and mere communication (Lipman, 2003, pp. 87–93). From a technical point-of-view, each session of P4C follows a predetermined structure: the discussion is stimulated by what might be called a “text-pretext” (i.e., an episode from specific short stories and novels written by Lipman and other researchers, such as Ann M. Sharp); then participants pose questions and propose issues to be discussed, debated, and reflected upon; each session ends with an individual and collective self-evaluation.

Philosophical dialogue is based on argumentative and “critical” thinking, but gains effectiveness only by putting into practice “higher-order thinking” (Lipman, 1995, p. 1), by activating at the same time the “creative” and “caring” dimensions of thinking, and by enhancing contribution that emotions make to human thought (Lipman, 2003, pp.

127–138). Due to this *multidimensionality* (see especially Lipman, 2003, p. 200), any CI can successfully tackle delicate and complex issues, such as recasting individual and social values, and enhancing community inclusion – indeed, “inclusiveness” is the first of the features of communities of inquiry listed by Lipman (Lipman, 2003, p. 95). These achievements are closely related to the individual and social competences that are enhanced by the CI, such as: autonomy, reflectivity, self-reflectivity, self-correction, sensitivity to context, ability to apply critical and self-critical thinking skills, creative and caring thinking, as well as the ability to argue and to sustain the reasons for personal choices, actions, values, and beliefs (Lipman, 2003, pp. 25–27).

As for the intercultural and democratic issue we are considering, I would like to stress the unique role played by “caring thinking”:

To care is to focus on that which we respect, to appreciate its worth, to value its value. Caring thinking involves a double meaning, for on the one hand it means to think solicitously about that which is the subject matter of our thought, and on the other hand it is to be concerned about one’s *manner* of thinking. (Lipman, 2003, p. 262)

This peculiar dimension of rationality highlights our intense desire for reality and for the abundance of diversities, which endow reality with worth and value (Lingua, 2013). Moreover, caring thinking appears to be unavoidably entangled in a subtle paradox connected to appraising differences:

caring is a kind of thinking when it performs such cognitive operations as scanning for alternatives, discovering or inventing relationships, instituting connections among connections, and gauging differences. And yet, it is of the very nature of caring to obliterate distinctions and rankings when they threaten to become invidious and, thereby, outlive their usefulness. Thus, caring parents, recognizing that “being human” is not a matter of degree, just as “being natural” is not a matter of hierarchy, do not attempt to assign rankings to their children; yet at the same time they recognize that there are significant differences of perspective so that things have different proportions in one perspective than they have in another. Those who care, therefore, struggle continually to strike a balance between that ontological parity that sees all beings as standing on the same footing and those perspectival differences of proportion and nuances of perception that flow from our emotional discriminations. (Lipman, 2003, p. 264)

Lipman describes “caring thinking” as being “appreciative” (or “valuational”), “affective”, “active”, “normative”, and “empathic” (Lipman, p. 1995, 8 ff.; Lipman, 2003, pp. 264–271; Marsal et al., 2009,

pp. 411–420). As a result, I believe it is precisely due to the combination of mutual respect and philosophical inquiry that the community and its members are able to foster inclusiveness and achieve criteria (gained through the shared discussion) by which they increase their sensitivity to context and diversities, their empathy for other people's situations, their ability to recognize and nurture plural viewpoints, their capacity to "build on each other's ideas, although not necessarily with identical architecture" (Lipman, 2003, p. 97), and to evaluate what is relevant and to distinguish it from what is not (Bitting, 1995; Turgeon, 2004, pp. 105–107; Marsal et al., 2009, pp. 89–102; see also Fraser, 1990, pp. 65–70).

Responsibility, philosophical inquiry, and intercultural pedagogy

In light of this, it should be clear that the outcome of communal philosophical inquiry is the undertaking of a cooperative "quest for meaning" in which each member of the community takes part (Lipman, 2003, pp. 95–96; Striano, 2005). Because of its intrinsically philosophical character (i.e., fallible, revisable, and self-corrective), this product ought to be continuously and reflectively revisited (for the idea of "reflectivity", see Dewey, 1933 and Schön, 1983). In addition, the process of philosophical inquiry highlights a unique methodology: tackling a problem involves at first an effort to widen its context and horizon, in order to acknowledge which philosophical devices (terms, ideas, interpretative keys, etc.) are at issue. As a consequence, the matter is examined in a new light and in a renewed context. However, is this effort likely to generate some durable modifications to the life of the community and of its members, and in what sense are these practical modifications to be experienced, understood, and investigated?

What I intend to argue is that the issue can be clarified through the idea of responsibility, the meaning of which is indeed double: first, it pertains to the effective consequences of human behaviour; however, it also evidences a wider and challenging horizon of sense, within which any concrete human being exists and performs his or her actions (Jonas, 1984; Benhabib, 1985; Nussbaum, 2010). Moreover – and this is certainly relevant for the present chapter – I wish to demonstrate that responsibility helps us, among others things, to better understand the overall meaning of human existence and freedom in terms of a reflective relationship to otherness and diversity.

As indicated by twentieth century hermeneutical, cultural, and philosophical anthropology, the peculiarity of the human being's dynamic

constitution is exemplified by a dual polarity of opposites, such as self-centredness and being-othered (in German: “Veränderung”: Theunissen, 1965; Friese, 2002), relation-to-the-self and relation-to-the-other, autonomy and heteronomy, assimilation and accommodation, etc. (see among others Geertz, 1983, 2000; Remotti, 1992; Augé, 1995; Gobbo, 2000, 45 ff.; Paolicchi, 2007; Fistetti, 2008, 111 ff.; Waldenfels, 2008; Henry, 2009; Grant-Brueck, 2011, pp. 4–5).

Freedom and responsibility are just another exemplification of the same polarity. Moreover, they seem to gain hermeneutical clarity only due to their mutual relationship. Thus, on the one hand, freedom can be interpreted as a tendency towards self-realization, the fulfilment of desires, the achievement of goals, the need for relationships with other (human) beings, the active process of giving shape to the world, the capacity to design, etc. On the other hand, due to responsibility, the human being experiences his or her own specific commitment to listen and (freely) respond to claims coming from others (Jonas, 1984; Murphy-Gilligan, 1980; Benhabib, 1985). Responsibility entails sensitivity to the pressure of circumstances, and an awareness of the “other’s” claims, specificity, and difference, along with his or her right to be treated with equal respect and concern. Therefore, any responsible individual evidences the basic twofold possibility/duty to carry out a *critical inquiry into otherness*, in order to clearly recognize, accept, and eventually enhance or criticize the prerogatives of the so called “other” (see among others Taylor, 1994; Benhabib, 2002; Beck, 2006; Waldenfels, 2006; Fistetti, 2008, 133 ff.; Rosario del Collado, 2011-12; Taylor, 2012).

However, the “good balance” between freedom and responsibility requires thorough education, the aim of which is the overall flourishing of the human-being. This goal is achieved through the cultivation of personal desire, the empathic recognition of the other, and a self-reflective attitude towards one’s own existence/diversity (Nussbaum, 1997; Gobbo, 2000, pp. 9–16; Turgeon, 2004, pp. 98–100; Giusti, 2004, 100 ff.; Nussbaum, 2010; Rosario del Collado, 2011-12). Moreover, the close relationship between education and responsibility elucidates a *normative* issue (i.e., not only a fact, but something we ought to do): I *ought* to build strong and dynamic relationships with the so-called “diversities;” I *ought* to engage in dialogue with them, and to take care of them in order to give my contribution to the building of inclusive communities. However, on the other hand, I have to “resist any simplistic dismissal of differences or uncritical embracing of them” (Turgeon, 2004, p. 107). And -- this is a topic which requires further research -- one of the most effective ways of understanding the complexity of this duty, is to share with others a

philosophical inquiry into the common good, like the one proposed by Matthew Lipman's *philosophy for children/community*.

This takes us back to democracy, since the idea of responsibility may also act as a guide for the realization – in the era of globalization – of innovative and democratic forms of intercultural citizenship, which distance themselves from two dreadful pathologies of the globalized age, namely the construction of “exclusive identities” (and “endogamic communities”), on the one hand, and forms of “nihilistic relativism” (with their *pendant* of “unrestrained individualism”), on the other hand (Pulcini, 2013; see also Bleazby, 2006; Turgeon, 2004).

Before concluding, I wish to draw attention to the close relationship of these philosophical reflections to intercultural pedagogy. In particular, I wish to single out the following common issues, which unfortunately I cannot develop further in this context: a) the need for pluralistic dialogue, reflectivity, and the practice of empathy (Giusti, 2004, pp. 74–76; Portera, 2006; Perry, 2011, p. 454); b) interculturality as a thorough methodology for the understanding of knowledge, diversity, and human relations, and not as merely a specific branch of education (Portera, 2003b, p. 22; Portera, 2011, p. 17); c) the need to abandon substantialising, static and monolithic views of individual and social identity in favour of dynamic, multifaceted, and porous interpretations of the latter (Rey-von Allmen, 2003, pp. 39–40; Gobbo, 2000, 68 ff.).

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to verify whether the combination of philosophical inquiry and intercultural education is able to provide a fruitful understanding and, at least some elements of, a feasible management of the complex socio-economic, political, and cultural dynamics of the globalized era, especially those related to the appreciation of cultural and religious diversities in democratic contexts.

The main result of this philosophical investigation is the revision of certain notions, such as identity, democracy, freedom, and responsibility. This effort entails abandoning substantialising models of interpretation and evidencing the “intercultural” structure of those ideas – that is, their intrinsic connection to otherness, difference, and diversity. This is particularly true for freedom and responsibility: their unique brotherhood evidences that they can *only* be understood as co-freedom and co-responsibility. Therefore, freedom and responsibility reveal their deepest meaning through an intrinsic *being-related-to-otherness*. This means that any specific and concrete manifestation of freedom and responsibility (be

it an individual deed or a community inquiry process) entails a reflective process of continuous re-acceptance, re-configuration, re-framing, and re-negotiation of understandings, meanings, demands, values, etc.

The approach I have described above – Lipman’s P4C – succeeds precisely in showing how this process (which is also an ethical duty) can be practically fulfilled through a public activity focusing on (philosophical) inquiry. Furthermore, it highlights that this dynamic enhances intercultural competences, reinforces individual and social sensitivity to otherness and diversity, and gives strength to any attempt to support differences.

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