

# Education for a Culture of Peace and Co-Existence

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## *Introduction*

The turn of the millennium is an era of rapid globalization. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and other Communist regimes in the early 1990s there has been rapid growth of an economically liberal world market (Bocchi & Ceruti, 1991). In this global market, many people relocate to look for education and jobs suited to their needs and interests (Caponio & Colombo, 2005). Moreover, armed conflicts, violence and extreme poverty have forced millions to become refugees or migrants. Complex international networks, linked by modern communication technology, are created by these various types of migration. To meet such dramatic changes on the world stage, while respecting dignity and equality as set forth by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, requires the development of new educational models.

In particular, we must consider the extent to which education enables social groups to understand and respect cultural behaviours and social relationships unfamiliar to them, but natural to others with whom they come into contact (Nussbaum, 1999). Do schools educate in a way that prepares people to interact with others from different cultures? Do they educate regarding the importance of issues affecting human rights, health, ethnic, religious and gender relations? Have educational methods evolved in response to changes since the Cold War? Have they adapted to the reality created by new communication and transportation technologies (Orefice, 2011)?

This article explores and analyzes some key contributions to theories of educational reform regarding peace and co-existence in an era of globalization.

## *A global-humanistic philosophy of co-existence*

The complex social scenarios in which individuals and groups must now operate present myriad social, political and communicative choices. People need skills to deal with these choices in a way which values human rights and human development. Many writers have addressed this, such as Aloni (2011) who writes of the need for a "...cosmopolitan worldview and ethical code that posits the enhancement of human development, well-being, and dignity as the ultimate end of all human thought and action; namely, giving priority to the

values of human dignity, equity, growth and solidarity over any alternative set of values – religious, ideological, economic, or national. It further entails a commitment to form a pluralist and just democratic social order, devoted to both human rights and social solidarity: providing every individual with a fair opportunity to enjoy a full and autonomous life, characterized by personal welfare, broad education, cultural richness, self-actualisation, and involved democratic citizenship” (pp. 35-36).

To achieve this requires a ‘global humanism’ which considers the construction of the knowledge of each complex human being (Balducci, 2005, 2006). This goes far beyond sharing online images of poverty and tragedies, which only breeds passive uncertainty. The mind not only thinks, but also feels, participates, communicates. Educators are responsible for giving essential resources for the development of minds that are able to understand social relations and the skills to navigate them. This requires a model of interdisciplinary education, integrating subjects previously treated as separate fields: culture (philosophy, literature, poetry, and arts), social sciences, natural sciences, physical education and so forth. Morin (2005) describes this as “a systemic thought to put together elements that are part of the same system”. In this way, education for complex thought goes beyond the dimension of simple knowledge. It looks towards the future and examines the topic of ‘common destiny’. Similarly, democracy must be considered beyond the single dimension of citizen participation in the political process. A ‘cognitive democracy’ encompasses social, political, and scientific realms, and it recognizes and is committed to a community with a common destiny. For example, economically useful advances should not be developed based on knowledge alone, but also reflect an understanding of economic and social relationships. A holistic model includes respect for and harmony with oneself, others and the natural environment (Cheli, 2004).

Whenever conditions and tools for the development of dialogue are *not* produced, there is inevitably a deep deprivation of human rights. Lack of dialogue not only hinders exchange of knowledge, it leads to problems in cultivating relationships, and the normalization and acceptance of separation, marginalisation and exclusion. “We need to be capable of accepting otherness, working with otherness. This means communicating, and the communication starts from oneself. We need to be capable of discussing with oneself, if we want to discuss with others,” (Morin, 1989, p. 158). Dialogue can help deconstruct fears, especially those created from the ethos of conflict (Bar Tal, 2013). A ‘global identity’ cannot be created without learning the tools of dialogue. Dialogue and empathic listening enable and encourage a meeting of different cultures, creating expectations and curiosity (Sclavi, 2003) and creative ways of managing conflict with ‘enemies’ (Galtung, 1996; Novara, 2011). Such communication skills can be acquired through education and practice.

Educational tools for developing mutually beneficial knowledge, and creative, cooperative and sustainable modes of intercultural coexistence must take into account socialization patterns that have deeply influenced the educational culture until now. There is an ever-greater need for multidisciplinary

education, encompassing formal schools, and informal and non-formal education which takes place in the home and community. This multidisciplinary education should encourage communication and interpretation skills across 'contexts of belonging' (Orefice & Sarracino, 2008). In other words, education should be reformed based on a re-evaluation of the socialization processes, towards a culture of peace (Morin, 1989).

Humans, by nature, develop social relationships. However, we should avoid presenting them through simple teachings that change according to context. Moral and ethical systems, social models, cultures, and religious regulations all affect a growing educational relationship (Foucault, 1969). This leads to an interpretation of reality and knowledge of an individual as the same as that of the community/group (Laporta, 1979).

The necessity for *life skills education* in schools to enable education for sustainable social procedure has been advocated for the past three decades. Such an approach encourages people to relate to others in order to face problems, pressures and stress of daily life. Delors (1996) presents *learning to live together* as one of the four pillars of education, arguing that this should have a specific place in school curricula, alongside other types of skills and knowledge necessary to understand the complexities of the new millennium. The issue of creating the conditions and the choice of methods for the building of life skills is connected to the objective of re-thinking education under an interdisciplinary perspective and according to the concept of *lifelong learning*. Life skills should be considered 'social currency' contextualized in relation to the possibilities of actions and functional, successful interventions. Pro-social skills, which facilitate and enable dialogue, cooperation and sharing, should be encouraged from early childhood.

### *Life skills education for a culture of peace*

It is not enough to plan and monitor educational proposals. Even those with an integrated and complex perspective, which encourage communication and dialogue among multiple stakeholders and agencies, do not guarantee the development of experiences of living together and creating a culture of peace. Similarly, we must consider the impact of new communication technologies on peace education. On the one hand, internet access may strengthen democracy and improve freedom of expression—a key factor in the development of a culture of peace according to the Court of Strasbourg.<sup>1</sup> Such technologies offer a unique contribution to the development of a society

<sup>1</sup> Support of participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge, freedom of information and communication and the sharing of information and knowledge are indispensable for a culture of peace. However, measures need to be taken to address the issue of violence in the media, including new information and communication technologies. Then see, [http://www3.unesco.org/iycp/uk/uk\\_sum\\_cp.htm](http://www3.unesco.org/iycp/uk/uk_sum_cp.htm)

of knowledge by enabling intercultural and interreligious dialogue (Guetta & Verdiani, 2011). At the same time, communication technologies may also be used to spread racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia or to incite hatred and violence. The challenge is to restrict such activities while minimizing limitations to freedom of expression (Marsili, 2009). Research in the field of Digital Humanities, and advancements carried out and achieved within this field, explore the intersection between technology and the humanities. Similarly, there are numerous Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1999) linked by technology. While communication systems offer great possibilities for exchange, we clearly need to pay attention to individual and collective responsibilities and choices enhancing positive and productive use of these tools. In other words, technological advances make the necessity of educating for conscious choice and social responsibility more urgent than ever.

Historical events such as wars, invasions, which are often used to explain large-scale anthropological, political and social changes, are ultimately the result of individual responsibilities and choices. Therefore, education which emphasizes responsible action and awareness of the changes and repercussions of every act is a fundamental tool for fostering coexistence and peace. In today's world, we must grapple with 'virtual' as well as 'real' events, making choices and taking responsibilities which do not always seem tangible and concrete.

Educating for peace does not imply guaranteeing idealistic living conditions *a priori*. Rather, it encourages acceptance of the idea of peaceful coexistence, awareness of it as a positive possibility, and investment in tools and actions which will promote its evolution. The goal of education is the model of positive peace, as described by Galtung (1996, p. 61): "a cooperative system beyond passive peaceful coexistence, one that can bring forth positively synergistic fruits of the harmony". Positive peace requires planning, intervention, and participation. Additionally, there are important societal conditions, relationships, and states of mind resting on shared values of harmony, justice, equity, and safeguarding wealth and quality of life. The educational projects must be open to all, necessitating a commitment to deconstruct all forms of marginalization, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

Thinkers like Morin, Feuerstein, and Bruner express a global view of the issue, emphasizing that educational reforms which are intended to reform thinking and feeling require deep analysis of education for intercultural and pro-social skills. Morin believes that every educational intention should start from the understanding that leads us to the 'knowledge of knowledge'. "The purpose of education is to transmit knowledge, and yet education is blind to the realities of human knowledge, its system, infirmities, difficulties, and its propensity to error and illusion. Education does not bother to teach what knowledge is. Knowledge cannot be handled like a ready-made tool that can be used without studying its nature. Knowledge about knowledge should figure as a primary requirement to prepare the mind to confront the constant threat of error and illusion that parasitize the human mind. It is a question of arming minds in the vital combat for lucidity" (Morin, 1999, p. 9).

Morin wants to overcome the limits created by the disciplinary and scientific self-legitimation. He believes that the abilities of the mind can be made more useful and practical in daily life by putting together existing disciplines, dismantling their internal hierarchies, and arousing a type of knowledge that is aware of its own errors, limitations and preconceptions. At the same time, such knowledge will accept the challenges produced by time, history, individual, cultural and social life (Morin, 1989). If we want to use our minds to investigate and analyze ourselves, it is important for educational paths to be derived from the belief of educability and intelligence, and introduce aware and critical acquisition of instruments of thinking and feeling. In his campaign for the need of educating every individual to the knowledge of knowledge, and in order to support the construction of free, active minds, capable of choosing individually for the good of the society, Feuerstein creates an educational system that combines the operational experience of the mind with a warm and enriching educational relationship. The philosophy of mediation proposed by Feuerstein is part of 'cognitive education', a concept which refers to development of thinking skills, empowerment of adaptive behaviour, and promotion of effective and self-realizing behaviour. These are key principles required in order to achieve autonomy of thought, consistent personality and the ability of discernment, all of which are elements required for proper integration into social life. According to Feuerstein (Feuerstein et al., 1995), it is the experience of mediated learning that, thanks to intentionality, reciprocity and cognitive modifiability, leads to the creation and the understanding of possibilities and conditions for the development of the mind and life skills. The knowledge of knowledge encourages us to start travelling within our cultural context with curiosity, humility and courage. Nothing can be certain, true or absolute. In any case, it is important to understand how culture itself represents a context of education. It has to be investigated and evaluated in its many forms and expressions. Yet this necessitates acquisition of tools for thinking and feeling that make such research possible. To implement change, education has to first encourage the creation of the tools of change. This happens, according to Feuerstein and Bruner, in connection with cultural meanings and practices. Lack of an active and critical education that enables individuals to understand the culture within the culture creates culturally deprived people. Such deprivation makes people unable to manage their social participation and their autonomous decision-making in an active, responsible and creative way.

Like Feuerstein, Jerome Bruner (1990) underlines the importance of culture in the learning processes. However, Bruner focuses on the role of school and how it relates to knowledge of the extracurricular world. Culture prepares the mind for learning while providing a set of tools which build representation of the world and self-perception, including identity, sense of belonging and awareness of skills (Bruner, 1996). Considering the relationship between teaching and learning in the context of the school, reveals the importance of understanding cultural differences that are part of social models and practices. Culture evolves to oppose the fanaticism and extrem-

ism disguised as religious faiths, which present themselves as guardians of an exclusive, all-encompassing truth. If schools – and education in general – are to create a culture which can face the crisis affecting the entire world, they need to provide cognitive and emotional tools that allow individuals to understand global culture while working locally (Ferrara, 2014). Following Bruner (1996), people involved in education must encourage listening, comprehension skills, dialogue and exchange. This is not possible if teachers are only engaged in the control of students' performances, and if they cannot identify and directly experience the knowledge and the skills required for this kind of education. The current educational model continues to support politics, strategies, educational regulations and didactical interventions created around a dualistic model (i.e. rich and poor, good and bad, normal and abnormal). The persistence of this dualistic model in Western culture can be seen in the ongoing distinction between developed (rich) and developing (poor) countries; the latter are still often referred to as the 'Third World'. This legitimates and perpetuates the consideration of cultural differences using a non-cultural indicator (since it deals with an economic comparison), thus making a false and paradoxical understanding of reality. By limiting understanding to simple linear relationships of cause and effect, without the use of a conditional and/or utopia, such a model denies the possibility of understanding reality in all its complexity. Teaching pro-social skills involves investment in dynamics and processes that value personal aspects, resources and skills, and act not only for the growth and development of the individuals' knowledge, but create the conditions for a high-quality relationships and social welfare. Models of transformation should contribute to the creation of social welfare, rather than a model which advocates competition, strength and wealth as primary objectives, in which knowledge is fostered by fears and often-imperceptible exploitations.

Research dealing with pro-social behavior (Caprara & Bonino, 2006) is increasingly relevant for pedagogical reflection that dialogues with social psychology and neuroscience. Following this view, survival of species is not the result of competition and violence; it is rather the ability to use and share aspects of material and ideal culture, which are useful to the creation of new knowledge. This is clear if we take into account analyses of Darwin's theories (Piovani, 2011) which support the ideal of progress achieved by humans through evolution. Dynamics and processes that are not limited to growth and development of knowledge create the conditions for a high-quality relationship and social welfare. In this way, it is possible to overcome the concept of socialization that has thus far influenced educational culture, whose nature has been limited to the positivity of what individuals experience in different situations and places, especially at school. In this way, the school is able to activate different communication styles when meeting people from different cultural settings. This requires an accurate investment of a pro-social use of knowledge, as well as of skills acquired during the educational process.

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of Children affirms that every child, regardless of status, cultural provenance or gender, has the right to education. This will promote educational success and social welfare of the individual within the community and in the global sense that considers the 'world as a homeland' – of everyone (Morin, 2001). However, if we want to fight manipulations and political demagogies, we need to be aware of education's "side effects" especially in places where social and religious conflicts or armed conflicts are taking place. In such settings, the educational system might become a potential source of conflict which contributes to the spread of discrimination and violence. The evaluation of how school curricula, along with formal and informal educational practices, implicitly convey such models – with the help of mass media – represents a starting point for an educational change, whose final goal is social cohesion (Tawil & Harley, 2004).

In its Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations mentions the changes and the expectations connected to the birth of a global society. They require educational models built on theories of co-existence, active and cooperative social participation, and ideals of how human potentialities can be activated within the educational field. Adults should not delegate their educational and formative responsibilities to virtual tools, even if these seem to be better for communicating with young generations. Delegating responsibilities will turn into a reference behavioural model and the educational loss experienced by younger generations will result in the impossibility of understanding the sense and the meaning of social choices and the construction of cultural relations. Relieving adults of their responsibilities will keep new generations from realizing a shared life.

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