

In bounds/out of bounds

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E. Besozzi (2006) asserts that the crisis of the classic model on the integrated relation among society, culture, and education, proposed by E. Durkheim and T. Parsons, is increasing the insecurity of contemporary people. I believe that the lack of a clear-cut model can indeed give rise to an issue of security/insecurity, but not just to that. We are forced, in fact, to discuss more generally the endeavor to reduce complexity that has characterized the western thought for, at least, the last two-hundred years.

We try to understand phenomena using schemas and models, as we are unable to grasp the richness and variety of reality. This is a scientific method that casts light on many different issues, but leaves untouched several topics. Really, I feel happy when models are contradicted since I am glad that schemas are unable to lock up human events, men and women and, especially, to limit the education. I believe that such a dichotomy between the endeavor to know and define, giving rise to a system, and the effort to escape from this *cage* is, from an heuristic point of view, extremely important and we should strive to preserve this dichotomy, in particular when we are talking about education. Talking about education is, indeed, discussing a process deeply characterized by change: what is education if not change and dynamic process?

We need ways of knowing that are useful for planning, that leave room for re-examination, in order to keep pace with the time. Therefore, starting right from this need for a dichotomy, I would like to suggest studying and thinking about two main issues.

The first issue points toward crossing bounds or, in other words, toward breaking the knowledge cage, and it shows the need to grasp *something else* than just what we put in the “education” case.

Instead, the second issue is related to an effort of bounding, or, in other words, to get back, again, a stable reference point from where we can start, allowing the research and educational policy to grow.

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As for “out of bounds”, we can state that “In the beginning... was Durkheim”. Even Elena Besozzi’s book (2006) begins with Durkheim’s words. From there, epistemologically speaking, start the process of sociological analysis of the education and the answer to what education is. Indeed, with Durkheim we turn education into a social process and we define it within the boundaries of the horizontal reality, within the relationship among generations, with all the consequences in terms of institutionalization and definition of a language and space in which it takes place, but also in terms of the normative definition and aims ascribed to the education at the intersection between society and culture.

We need to keep very clear in mind, especially because we are educational sociologists, that we start from this point and from these methodological boundaries, which make the education look like that “thing”.

Of course, after that, we had approaches focused on the complexity, on the distinction, and we have put under scrutiny the integrationist-functional models. We have reasoned about multiculturalism and the fundamental role of communication in the educational process. I agree that we should now accept the challenge coming from A. Touraine who states that the focus toward culture appears to eat up the focus toward the society. I have been struck by an expression in his book (2008) where he states “now that we talk about ourselves from a cultural point of view”, which means that we define people and memberships on the basis of specific lifestyles, starting from native cultures, as it is clearly shown by the problems related to immigration and multiculturalism. In Touraine’s opinion, there is nowadays a focus on the cultural dimension that seems to break apart and detach from the social issue, from the structure and social status of the individuals. It is true that the model has changed in fundamental and conflicting ways. However, in my opinion, Durkheim is still influential for its strive for delimitation, for the definition of the event, the behaviors, the goals that we analyze. This *strong* definition of education as an introduction in the society casts light on some key elements, leaving untouched other dimensions that are part of the education. We will argue later on whether sociology should analyze only the first dimension. In other words, if Durkheim’s concern is a simple methodological consideration that does not become, really, essence and reduction.

However, if we want make a step forward to explain contemporary and future education, crossing the boundaries built on the basis of Durkheim’s

model, we should refer to multiple dimensions. In the sociological domain, we can look at Simmel who suggested that we know the other people on the basis of their social status, but that human beings are *more* than just members and products of the society. In other words, there is “something more” that is not clearly defined, but extremely meaningful and much more important than the distance that the interactionist model allows us to establish between the I and the other.

Such “something more”, when linked to education, makes me think about something I would be very happy to study and analyze: the walls, the squares, the streets in a town, the objects that come across our everyday life, the landscapes, the trees, the seas that reach our self-awareness and turn to be part of what we are and what we become. Those things change together with us, in a way that we are unable to see, submerged, but surely important. Within this “something more” I would also put the focus on materiality, corporeity. The Sociology of education is for a large part focused on the brain, or maybe on the emotions and the heart, but not much on materiality.

A further “other” that is very important today (but Durkheim forcefully pushed it away from his definition of education), is the connection with the religious and transcendental dimension. Obviously, we can analyse religious issues from a social point of view. However the religion, God, the divinity may not be exclusively social events. They may be “something more” and, therefore, what can happen if we define this man or this woman not only in association with the adults, the other people or the educational institutions, but also in relation with “something more” that comes from outside and remains outside?

How can we combine the question “who am I?” with those connections (characterized by a religious essence) that many people have, and that are becoming so visible nowadays, not only because the immigrants show them, but also because the religion is becoming again a key issue in the society? Can we avoid to think about how religion can influence identities and belongings?

I believe that there is a need to cast light, even with sociological tools, on something *other* than the social relationship and the relation among generations. I think this is a major point in order to reason on issues like personal freedom, the chance of innovation, and also, I believe, to reason on the bounds and meanings of the education of the earthly identity suggested by E. Morin.

We should avoid the exclusive attention on the relation among groups and people in the social and cultural structure.

There is a need for crossing bounds, opening the road and let new stimuli go through, which also means to turn to other disciplines, to discuss with other people, to debate with physicists, geographers, and not only with social scientists. Nevertheless, once we have recognized such a need of trespassing, that requires commitment, research, and analysis, there is no doubt that we still have to look at Durkheim as we cannot abstain from working on the construction of the social relationship. The society of individuals must reflect seriously on how to construct a social relationship that fits our time, a social relationship that does not look like a chain, a cage, but like a red thread.

Can a society grow if there is no chance to create solid and persistent social relations?

It is precisely at this point that, talking about the school, we have a urge to go back to Durkheim and to the analysis of the connection between education and society as we are at risk to focus too much on ethnical-cultural issues. We need to keep working, even in innovative ways, on equity issues in the educational strategies, developing categories that help us to understand what is going on in our multicultural society. It is our task to analyze issues like the one concerning the merit, that is invoked, with more or less conviction, by everybody both from the right and the left side. However, it is worthwhile to start reasoning on what the merit really is. We should discuss what is the merit in education and at school and if it is possible to curtail this dimension to the paradigm of the Homo Economicus or to another utilitarian paradigm, therefore giving up on other dimensions that might be linked to expressiveness, to gratuitousness and to the gift. From here starts a new direction of analysis coherent with what I stated before about the anthropological analysis of the human being.

We need to reason about social ties and the construction of the *We*. A. Cavalli talked about the need for a moral education and training of the teachers (2008). I am focusing on the necessity to study, understand, and plan the construction of the *We*, as a key issue in a society characterized by multiple belongings. I think we could agree that we are living in a context of multiple belongings to territories, social contexts, groups, political views and ideals. Among the new generations there is a mix of different types of belongings and reference points. However, it is noteworthy to remember that on many cases the multiple belongings are only instantaneous

relations. As a consequence, I believe that a responsibility of the adults, more than other generations, is to make an effort in order to put together, in some way, those multiple belongings. Not to bring them back to a single entity, but to make possible the existence of a human being that is simultaneously Padano, Italian, European and so on. We have to work in order to grasp which is the meaning of this mix of multiple belongings, understanding how to build and provide to everybody, not only young people, the skills to manage these plurality of references.

I would like to conclude remembering that the issue about the *We* sends us back not only to the domain of the multiple belongings, but also to the issue concerning the everyday civic duties that are so important for the process of construction of the sociality, or, in other words, for our ability of building, in the classrooms, in the streets, in the squares, a community based on a few shared rules that characterize the day-to-day life.

Mauro Magatti suggested, in a work on the abandoned city (2007), that the sociality has increasing difficulties to reproduce itself in an autonomous way, and that it often exists only in relation with the functions that organize the life of a city. I think that such a point is true. Being a “street sociologist” and looking at the relations between children, university students and resident citizens in Bologna, I realize that the construction of a day-to-day sociality is a new social issue and an important educational challenge.

References

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