Connecting Education to Society through Karl Mannheim's Approach

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[Review of the book: *Introduzione alla sociologia dell'educazione*, by K. Mannheim & W. A. Campbell Stewart, La Scuola, 2017. ISBN: 9788835039235]

If society changes, the educational system must change. Education is an enabling tool for people, aguidein life, which helps them enter the labour market; it engages them in society and in the time they live in. In a time of constant change the educational system needs constant updating, especially in a democracy, because it requires the participation of citizens. "In traditional, capitalistic democracies condescending public attitudes and calcified educational procedures have largely neutralized the psychological resources of youth. The revitalization of society demands a break with these obstructive practices; they must be replaced by a democratic youth policy which will permit the growth of a nation-wide youth-oriented educational system". This is how Gunther Remmling (2015, p. 119) explains Karl Mannheim's interest in a new education.

An introduction to the sociology of education collects Karl Mannheim's thoughts on educational matters. It was published posthumously thanks to William A. Campbell Stuart. It was a considerable attempt tooffer an organic view on the question: the work is based on various materials that sums up the studies of the last period of the Hungarian sociologist's life. This work was edited for the first time in 1962 (but the Italian translation came out in 1967). Now what more can it tell us again?Any answer to our starting question can be found inside the two forewords, introducing the

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work. Guido Gili's introduction to the new Italian edition (2017) suggests that the essay leads us todiscover the roots of a discipline. The work's structure helps to understand the complexity of a "new" social science, which starts from the definitions of some concepts, goes through the comparison to other disciplines without losing its peculiarity,and examines in depth some key issues of the theory approaches, validated by some empirical analysis and method examples.

The second foreword is the repurposed introduction to the first Italian edition (1967) by Sergio De Giacinto. Here the scholar contextualizes Mannheim's work inside his theoretical thought and it can be summarized as a *continuum* between two poles. On one side, the exploration of the *Weltanschauung* as an instrument to understand the social conditioning of thought withinthe cultural factors of the social system, and, on the other side, the *building of action theory* framed in the proposal of freedom in a democratic planning (Mannheim, 1950).

These two points of view show the multiple options offered by a reading of the last work by Mannheim. According to the Hungarian sociologist, the peculiar contribution of sociology is cooperating to the creation of an organic vision, so as to become a source for the other sciences - above all the humanistic, social and historicalones. That is how he explains itin Sociology of Knowledge, when he underlines the importance of identifying the relationship between historical realityand the cultural and social roots of ideas and ideologies. This helps to avoid abstractions and to trace a path to a worldview of a specific society (Mannheim, 1952). The sociology can serve the same purpose for education.

The book is organized in four parts. The first part deals with theoretical problems: Mannheim contextualizes the question, defines the concept, and explains the educational emergency of the time: he points out, on the one hand, how each age and every social structure have defined their own educational system, so that the social change in progress requires a new way of dealing with the transmission of knowledge (The Historical character of education aims" Chapter IV); on the other hand, he highlights the limits of partial approaches, which consider education as a process of notion transfer from one individual to another or which use education to transfer knowledge to the community. In Mannheim's view, instead, a sociological approach considers the complexity of the relationship between a social *ego* and a community, personal freedom and the influence of the

social and cultural context ("Individualism and the Sociological Approach" Chapter V).

The second (Psychological matters) and the third part (Social aspects of personality development) are devoted to learning and personality development. We are presented with the opportunity to apply the studies of new scientific disciplines such as pedagogy and psychology to a concrete social field: education. The importance of passive and active learning is emphasized: ranging from instinct to habit, from expressing oneself through language to the understanding of cultural symbols. The fundamental concept of personal and social identity is also illustrated here.

The fourth part (Sociological Factors) outlines a first map of the sociological dimensions of the educational theme: it highlights the system of relationships emerging between educational agencies, between teacher and pupils, among students, between class and school; it underlines the importance of structuring institutional times and relationships through the organization of the school system.

The last part (Future) is devoted to the future. Mannheim identifies the need to connect educational processes. There is a specialized education that tends to focus on the preparation for professional skills useful to the economic system, while it lacks in attention to the *Weltanschauung* of an *era*, which offers a wise reading of the existence of the citizens.

We have three points to highlight for education sociology today: the relationship with society, the building of identity, and educational criteria.

The relationship between democracy and education
The final path of Mannheim's studies is focused on the Third Way, an alternative to oppressivetotalitarianism and to wild liberalism. To clarify his starting point, the author underlines two limits of the regimes of his time: on the one hand Germany, where education had become a propaganda and control system for Nazism; on the other hand the United States or Great Britain, where a widespread public education system failed to overcome illiteracy or to promote high education among the most vulnerable citizen. He thinks education cannot lead to the approval of thought nor can reproduce social inequality.

The project is shaped by Freedom, power and democratic planning (Mannheim, 1950). He knows that his "utopia" would be systematically unfinished without the active participation of citizens. According to him, democratic behaviour and democratic personality are essential. An

introduction to the sociology of education moves within this awareness. The relationship between education and democracy is very close and it is indispensable in Mannheim's vision.

In the first part of the book, there is an osmotic relationship between the social structure and the goals of education. Democracy needs a dynamic society. So, it is crucial to communicate to the people the possibility of combining cultures as a precondition (Mannheim, 1950, p. 92) in order to affirm the tolerance of different and coexisting ideals. Conversely, a static society crystallizes the ideas and runs the risk of fanaticism and conformism.

Mannheim proposes a mapping of the needs of a democracy to which education answers: he reports the importance of a relationship between individual desires and common goods; the search for collaboration - today we would say interdependence (Myers & Barber, 2004) - among the nations; the focus on cardinal virtues: cooperation, responsibility and tolerance.

Education offers a double action: accompaniespeople's growth and helps them to orient themselves inside the society; and encourages people to take action to develop the institutions they attend to.

Democracy needs to educate people, because it requires them a fair distribution of power and responsibilities. If citizens do not participate in public life, the system implodes.

If in a traditional and static society education system was aimed at enabling all the people to work, in a democratic and dynamic society it also takes on the tasks of transferring some capabilities – we can say now (Nussbaum, 2007): the understanding of the world, the development of imagination and creativity. Education becomes a tool of personal and community well-being. Current studies, based on the capability approach, demonstrate that education is a guarantee for the quality of a democratic system based on equal opportunities (Chiappero Martinetti & Sabadash, 2014), and it is a chance to escape from social disadvantages (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2013).

Mannheim questions a still-present issue: what is the fundamental educational kit for a citizen in democratic society?

He warns that education cannot be limited to training to work. This would be dangerous because it would prevent the development of the political dimension. Every citizen needs to develop a democratic behaviour based on tolerance and integrative cooperation (Casavecchia, 2016). So,

everyone will be stimulated to participate actively and proactively in social life. A democracy implodes without active citizens.

Social and cultural effects of a new education to form a personal identity

Learning is not a simple transfer of information and experience, it is a process that engages all the personality. Mannheim believes personal identity is not given in nature. It is developed in relation to the social environment. The task of educational processes is to help the formation of coherent personalities with society. Mead and Dewey are the two main reference authors who describe the development of personality in the mutual action between man and the environment - we read in the third part of the book.

Mannheim agrees with Mead that there is a process of acquiring the consciousness of *ego*: firstly, the experience of the Other as different from the Self. Secondly, the development of role-taking, which provides organized forms of action bound by rules and expectations. Then, the Generalized Other, which involves the recognition of the community moral standards and, hence, the ability to calibrate individual choices in complex situations and the ability to understand their responsibilities.

Here, the interesting concept of mask is developed, understood as an expression adopted by an individual to live in a specific situation. The mask is not a false appearance behind which to hide. It becomes a synthesis between the expectations of the community and individual creativity. The various dimensions of the mask-person concept meet: the relationship between the awareness of one's actions and the responsibility towards the community; the conditioning of socialization factors that come from the social status of origin and the definition of preferences; the dialogues between the *Ego object* (outlined by the social system) and the *Ego subject* (showed by self-awareness). A comparison between the actor and the system emerges, then, from the intersection of the different dimensions.

The "new society" requires from citizens both self-awareness and a sense of free and open independence. These elements feed creativity: to develop them, attention should be paid to spontaneity, which is a feature to be cared for - through the use of games and fantasy - in the educational path. Mannheim identifies two tendencies: to affirm competition and to support cooperation. The two trends are not exclusive to each other. The educational process moves within these two poles: one privileges

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originality and creativity, the other increases loyalty, common work and favours the group and a sense of membership.

Through spontaneity - warns Mannheim - we can empower less involved and less prepared students because they will find new ways to express themselves and affirm their talents.

The Hungarian sociologist finds in the search for autonomy and competition the first signs of the process of individualization in which the desire for autonomy leads to the precariousness of ties (Beck, 1996) and concentration on the self can push towards diffused narcissism (Cesareo & Vaccarini, 2012). Two interesting aspects for us can be highlighted.

Some scholars (Bryolofsen & Mc Afee, 2011; Frey C. B. & Osborne, 2013) are talking about a new industrial revolution which integrates robotics into digital connectivity. This will deeply change the work and its required skills. In a so described historical period, spontaneity and creativity become a resource to link the world of school and the world of production.

Additionally, the cultural conditioning in the formation of the personality remains. According to Mannheim, there is a psychological dimension to the cultural construction residing in the universe of the self, in which the values inherent to behaviour are sedimented.

People communicate with others through culture, they use it to intertwine their relations and to reconcile conflicts. Culture provides the keys to the interpretation of human existence when it produces myths, legends, religions, artistic forms, and even legal systems or governmental ways. The goal of education is that every people can be fully themselves, express their originality and uniqueness. The cultural dimension requires a comprehensive approach to education. The author agrees with John Dewey (1997) when he points out how much education enables to perceive the "meaning" in a broader and more profound way. It thus helps the person to access a greater understanding of him/herself and of his/her world.

Some criteria to teach

Mannheim sees the difficulty of involving the masses in educational processes. So he proposes two "informative concepts". First, making the common citizen aware that education is a means for preparing to a job. This will encourage participation in school paths. Second, it is important to raise the awareness of the teacher to the task of planning the work with the goal

of an integral development of the person. This will encourage life in a society.

The fourth part of this book identifies some useful criteria, though dated in their concrete examples, to address the education system, proposing some theories and pedagogical methods in a sociological reading key. Mannheim warns against underestimating the importance of giving purposes toeducation. In his introduction, he writes: teaching is not enough, we need to be aware of the consequences of "educational opportunities".

The meaning of the word "educate", from the Latin "*educere*",to lead out, focuses the attention on students. Mannheim highlights this centrality of students, who are, in fact, the real protagonists. They should develop their talents and their skills through the educational process.

Together with the concept of social education, Mannheim reminds us of the importance of the socialization dynamics, which are fundamental experiences for men and womento build their characters. Educational agencies - such as family, church or small communities play a key role in this area. An example of this is the influence on the student performance resulting from collaborative families and antagonistic families. The first ones are facilitators, the second ones are obstacles within the education process.

Mannheim, here, also operates a distinction between formal and organized education and asocial education which is transmitted informally and often involuntarily by family, neighbourhood, city, and institutions. The concept of education requires an understanding of the social complexity. It has to consider the explicit and implicit contents of messages that are communicated by music, by consumer style, by forms of government, by media, by leisure time and work organization. There is a continuous communication to be built between the conventional education and the different social dimensions. This is an important contribution to the study of education thus given by Mannheim - as Coomonte (2001) noted.

Students grow in their social context and the school should coordinate and govern the educational action emerging from the various social subjects. School, too, aims at identifying the social conditioning created by the primary groups of boys and girls, so as to promote the positive ones and suppress the negative ones.

Another essential element is the role of the teacher, who connects children and young people to the adult world. The teacher's task is to build trust in institutions within young people. A unique and special relationship

is therefore developed betweenthem and theirstudents. A learning process is activated, which requires an involvement and an exchange between master and student. It's basic to pay attention at the person: "The coat should be cut according to the cloth, but it must also be cut according to the measurements of the person who will wear" (p. 76). Moreover, the task of balancing the need for competition and cooperation is entrusted to the teacher. Even today the legitimacy of teachers remains central, so it seems necessary to rethink and formulate their duties and the means of the authority (Colombo, 2016).

Now we can answer to our starting question: what more can this essay tell us?The book reminds us to follow and value three fundamental elements which will help to build an educational system: the contribution of education to democratic society; the importance of fostering identityshaping as an educational goal; the need for a continuous reformulation of school system criteria so that it can respond to historical reality. In order to do that, educational institutions should continue to meet the needs of people in a dynamic society - such as a democratic system - following the said three axes outlined inMannheim's reflection. They should always be taken into account and integrated with each other.As Carmelina Chiara Canta notes (2006, p. 106): "a democratic society can not be realized without the contribution of democratic and creative citizens. So the task of education will be to stimulate democratic personalities".

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