

THE WAY OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE PROCESS OF PREVENTING RADICALISM OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM

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Citizenship education as a tool to prevent violent radicalisation: the case of the European project REM: Rights, duties, solidarity Citizenship education and the prevention of radicalisation

In the Council of Europe Congress of 20 October 2015, resolution 384 was adopted (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 2016) in which the fundamental role of education in the prevention of violent radicalisation was highlighted: 'the important role of educational functions, especially those performed by families and schools, with a focus on topics such as respect for cultural diversity, human rights and the harm caused by hate speech'. (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 2016, p. 8) THEORY AND PRACTICE 17. At its 197th session, UNESCO's executive council also recognised the importance of education in fostering youth resilience, in particular by promoting global citizenship education and a positive sense of identity and belonging. (UNESCO, Centre for International Cooperation, 2019) a) The role of education is not to intercept possible violent extremists or to identify people who might, in the future, become such, but to: 'create conditions that enable learners to protect themselves against violent extremism by strengthening their commitment to nonviolence and peace'. (UNESCO, Centre for International Cooperation, 2019 a, p. 25). Through education, the following can be fostered, particularly in young people: the development of communication and interpersonal skills to be able to engage in dialogue and deal with dissent and learn peaceful approaches to change; the development of critical thinking; resilience to counter extremist narratives to develop socio-emotional skills useful for constructive engagement in society without resorting to violence. (UNESCO, Centre for International Cooperation, 2019 b, p. 17). Citizenship education, and especially the global citizenship education proposed by UNESCO, by making "reference

to a sense of belonging to the global community and to a common humanity, in which its members display mutual solidarity and a collective identity, as well as a collective responsibility at the global level" (UNESCO, Centre for International Cooperation, 2019 b, p. 17) can help promote resilience, especially in young people: 'it can encourage and motivate learners to contribute constructively to society by supporting social change through non-violent ways in their local communities. [...] Through global citizenship education, learners understand and appreciate the interdependence and interconnectedness of the world and its diverse populations. They learn to value and respect diversity and differences, and develop skills, attitudes and behaviours that enable them to thrive in diverse societies and make their own contribution'. (UNESCO, Centre for International Cooperation, 2019 a, p. 40). Education, seen from the sociological perspective is an "explicit and formalised part of the broader process of socialisation". (Besozzi, 2014, p. 39). The process of socialisation is the mechanism through which any member of a society, from childhood onwards, learns norms, values, lifestyles, in short the culture, of the society in which he or she joins (Giddens, 2006, p. 33).

Through education, therefore, it is possible to act on culture and consequently on the perception of belonging and identity, which are closely linked to it, and which come into play in the forms of violent radicalisation that occur precisely when the aforementioned dimensions are undermined by the contemporary context of complexity and by personal events that lead to a perception of poor inclusion or actual social exclusion.

In this context, therefore, the concept of education and culture interact with each other as inescapable instruments of the same process that originates and ends in the broader concept of *interculturality*.

When one enters the specific places of education and culture, i.e. first in the family and then in the school, interculturality can be acted upon and transmitted as an antidote to radicalism, starting above all from the school, as the place, the first, where different cultures come into contact with each other.

Initially, there was a reductive, partial, even misleading conception of interculturality. It was confused with the organisational management of a multi-ethnic classroom. One believes one is doing interculturality only because one promotes courses in Italian as language two; one draws up a vademecum for reception; one prepares a linguistic first aid; one sets up a

multi-ethnic shelf; one employs cultural mediators, etc.. Well, all this is not enough to make interculturality. These activities are certainly necessary to create the preconditions for interculturality. But it is still not interculturality.

There are methods that are experimented at school by educators who have chosen interculture as a positive aim of education, capable of ensuring a cognitive and anthropological enrichment, a broadening of the cultural horizon to which the entire learning process is linked, opening the person to a migrant, nomadic, mestizo identity. Methods with which we seek to promote a knowledge that is not closed in the form of "cognitive apartheid" but which accepts operations of re-reading, grafting of new knowledge, comparisons and mixing with other cultural realities. Implementing interculturality in the school using these methodologies therefore means using the heritage of one's own cultural tradition as a starting point to engage in new syntheses, accepting confrontation with other memories and narratives by relativising one's own perspectives. It is necessary to refer to new 'sources', new points of view, new genealogical reconstructions of knowledge (e.g. 'female').for a 'paideia for the 21st century' that will have to be intercultural, i.e. a paideia for the age of globalisation, of the pluriverse, of the metaverse, of cross-fertilisation. We will deal below with a number of methods to realise interculturality, as a new way of global citizenship.

Narrative method

This is perhaps the warmest, most welcoming and democratic method of doing interculture. Everyone, in fact, has something to narrate, if anyone is willing to listen. Without listening to the other, there is no interculturality.

The other, in intercultural education, must become an 'actor' just as we are. If interculturality is a "movement of reciprocity", then it is not enough to talk to the other, nor to talk about the other, but it is necessary to listen to the other. It is necessary that the other also speaks to us, that he reveals himself, that he communicates the story about his life.Both a child and an adult have a life story to tell. That is why no one is excluded from storytelling.

One can be asked to narrate a fairy tale, a party, a journey, a game, a dream, an adventure, a typical dish, a diary, a film, etc. Our conviction is

that the narrative route is one of the most effective methodologies for intercultural education.

Through the globality of languages and the direct narration of experiences it is indeed possible to realise an exchange of cultural values and to compare 'points of view' on reality. The aim of narrative pedagogy is not so much to increase the volume of narrative materials in the school as to give a 'narrative framework' to the educational process. In this way, narrative is no longer understood merely as the 'object' (the content) of education but as its new and original 'epistemic principle' (educating by telling). Concretely, life stories of migrants, biographies of witnesses, travel diaries, films and documentaries by foreign authors; poems and dramatisations; active participation and forms of collective memory are proposed.

Comparative method

A second way of intercultural education is the comparative method. This involves comparing two or more narratives or views or versions of the same object. What is important on the educational level is the broadening of the vision through the use of a new resource. In this way, one gets away from a one-sided and one-dimensional approach to education, avoiding the belief that there is only one true reproduction and faithful representation of a given reality. The comparative method is thus potentially a way to educate to complexity and pluralism, relativity and comparison (but not relativism). Examples of comparisons at school could be: the two figures of Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta; the two holy books Bible and Koran (but more generally the comparison of structural elements of Christianity and other religions); the fairy tale of the European Cinderella and the Arab, or Chinese, or Vietnamese Cinderella; the account of the crusades according to Europeans and according to Arab chroniclers; calendars in different cultures and the cycle of life in two cultures, etc.

"The Other Million. Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta on the Routes of China", by Antonella Fucecchi and Antonio Nanni, Emi, Bologna 2000, (book and video) is an example of a comparative teaching tool to be used at school. Marco Polo (Venetian, Italian, European, Christian, Medieval) and Ibn Battuta (Tangerine, Moroccan, Maghrebi, Muslim, Medieval), the former author of *The Million* and the latter of the *Rihla* (travelogues). Through this didactic tool, one can deal with everything that relates to their

Journey, the Look, the Tale. It is also worth mentioning the volume by C. M. Guzzetti, *Bible and Qur'an, Synoptic Comparison*, San Paolo, Milan 1993, a very useful teaching tool according to the comparative method.

As is well known, the Koran dedicates a series of verses to many characters that are the same as those in the Bible: 502 Verses to Moses; 245 Verses to Abraham; 131 Verses to Noah; 93 Verses to Jesus. There is no Passover in the Koran; no baptism of Jesus; no reference to prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah; Ezekiel, Daniel.

In a comparative-historical study between the Bible and the Qur'an, the following relationships could be explored:

- Biblical God - Qur'anic God;
- Biblical prophets - Qur'anic prophets;
- Biblical man - Qur'anic man;
- Biblical law - Qur'anic law;
- Biblical eschatology - Qur'anic eschatology;
- etc.

Deconstructive method

After the narrative and comparative method, we propose the way of deconstruction as the preferred strategy to educate on interculturality. In truth, one should speak of 'self-deconstruction' insofar as everyone is required to deconstruct what is unacceptable in their own culture. When different cultures meet/clash, they are most often in an 'asymmetrical' relationship. It is necessary to move away from an ideology of neutrality, the formal recognition of their equality in terms of value and civilisation is not enough, since the 'power relations' between the cultures themselves and the subjects that carry them remain to be resolved. What to do, then, so that intercultural dialogue is truly a relationship of reciprocity? One possible answer is through the practice of deconstructing prejudices, stereotypes, clichés, deforming images, ethnocentric linguistic categories, etc. This work must be carried out not in the abstract, but by going down to the very concrete terrain of ordinary language, of everyday communication, of the normal tools we use in education... to verify the meaning of deconstruction precisely on them. To bring about this change, it is necessary to 'build by deconstructing'. In other words, to construct a new (planetary) memory by deconstructing the dominant memory, which is ethnocentric but passes itself off as planetary. Deconstruction should therefore be understood as the promotion of the capacity to question

oneself, to revisit and revise one's ideas. It is a process of revision, of relativisation, of historicisation, of decentralisation of one's conceptual categories. In school, this didactics of 'deconstruction' can be implemented on at least four levels: linguistic-conceptual, relational-psychological, instrumental, structural. By placing oneself in a situation of deconstruction, the other is incited to do the same. This creates the principle of reciprocity: everyone can give and everyone can receive something.

As examples of deconstruction I would like to point out:

- the deconstruction of the concept of human races (since they do not exist in the plural);
- the deconstruction of the concept of intelligence (think of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences);
- the deconstruction of the way of narrating the transition from prehistory to history, which attaches importance above all to writing and undervalues oral culture instead;
- the deconstruction of male-dominated philosophy that never makes recourse to female figures who have made a contribution to the history of thought (consider that even school textbooks recount the history of philosophy from the pre-Socratics to the post-Nicene without ever mentioning a woman!);
- the deconstruction of the many prejudices that persist in public opinion about Islam;
- etc. etc.

Method of decentralisation (or points of view)

After the narrative, comparative and deconstructive methods, here we come to decentralisation. Educating to intercultural confrontation means first of all growing the capacity to decentralise one's own point of view, learning to consider one's own way of thinking not the only possible or the only legitimate one, but one among many. The anthropological and educational value of decentralisation lies in the pathway out of egocentrism and ethnocentrism. Decentralisation contains within itself an antidote to intolerance and racism. It is a democratic apprenticeship, a training to learn to accept the partiality of one's own truth, never totalising, never absolute, never definitive. Decentralisation requires accepting one's own limitations and mistakes, recognising that one needs others, being willing to listen and collaborate. All this requires a willingness and inner security that find their

origin not on the level of knowledge but in a serene affective maturation. It is through confrontation with others that new points of view can be discovered. It is important, therefore, that the school really characterises itself as a place of confrontation, structuring activities and paths that favour group work rather than individual work, mutual listening rather than frontal teaching, flexible learning contexts rather than rigid pre-structured paths. It is about discovering that for the other I am the other. Being seen and told by others helps us to relativise our point of view and sometimes to make us more aware of how we are. Concrete examples may be: the discovery/cognitive of America as seen from the Indians' side; the history of the West as told by the Iroquois; the Crusades as seen by the Arabs; Colonialism in Africa as told by the Africans; when the immigrants were us (letter from an Italian emigrant to Australia in the 1950s); the Sino-centric map (drawn by Chinese cartographers that places Europe to the North West of the planisphere and therefore 'decentralised'); the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale told from the wolf's point of view; the fairy tale of the three little pigs according to the point of view of each of them; their 'parents' and the wolf who arrives at the end, etc.

Method of recognising cultural debt

Here we come to a method that is a bit special, but very important for intercultural education: it involves leading the pupil to recognise the cultural debt that his or her own culture has towards other cultures. Indeed, many cultural realities (words, utensils, foodstuffs, plants, animals, symbols, rituals, etc.) that today are considered an essential part of 'my' culture, once did not belong to me. Then, through cultural exchanges, cross-fertilisation, hybridisation, borrowing, etc., they became incorporated into my culture to such an extent and so deeply that we have perhaps forgotten it today. This is what the recognition of cultural debt is for. It is about making children discover that, for example, so many terms we use in the Italian language are originally Arabic; that numbers in mathematics are Arabic; that the zero (0) was passed on to us by the Arabs who borrowed it from the Asian Indians; that so many food products come from the Americas; that literary masterpieces such as Dante's Divine Comedy must recognise their debt to earlier works such as 'The Book of the Ladder of Mohammed' (ed. SE, Milan 1991).

The method of action (or pedagogy of gestures)

In addition to knowledge and attitudes, intercultural education must also be able to value gestures, actions, behaviour, i.e. the pragmatic way of active citizenship education. To form 'more welcoming minds' and intercultural attitudes in young people, it is also important to promote initiatives and actions, because gestures have great educational value.

Let's make a quick list of examples:

- inviting one or more immigrants to school for a direct confrontation;
- organising a twinning or other forms of cultural exchange (inter-school correspondence) between different schools;
- participating in anti-racism initiatives;
- planning a visit to the Mosque or Synagogue or a Buddhist centre, etc.;
- setting up an intercultural exhibition;
- preparing a show with ethnic music;
- organising a peoples' festival (even cooking ethnic dishes);
- etc.

Plan actions and initiatives, always taking care to make pupils grasp the educational value of the gesture.

The playful way

Play is also an important tool for intercultural education. We are thinking above all of kindergarten and primary school, but with the right dosage and tricks it can also be used in secondary schools. Children, teenagers and young people show a great desire to get 'in the game'. The problem lies rather with the teachers, not all of whom are and not always willing to 'play'. Particular emphasis should be placed on didactic games, which express reality in an analogical way, and allow the problems they symbolically depict to be experienced without taking the risks. Through the playful way to interculturality, direct involvement is emphasised, putting oneself at stake through simulations, role-plays, dances, theatrical performances, dramatisations, etc. Furthermore, to practise interculturality as a method of thinking is to do interculturality by first enhancing what the subject curricula already contain. That is, to follow the ordinary way... hence, interculturality as the new normality of education. Interculturality is never censorship, impoverishment, a less... interculturality is always an

enrichment, an expansion, a more. Do interculturality by examining textbooks and supplementing them with other aids and materials that offer richer and more correct information.

To do interculturality by correctly employing cultural mediators who know how to act as bridges, foster inclusion, facilitate exchange, bring cultures closer together. To create interculturality by making interculturality indicators more visible in ordinary teaching equipment, for example by setting up a multicultural shelf with thematic paths, bridge-characters, bilingual books, etc.; by providing a plurality of cultural mediators in the classroom; by providing a plurality of cultural mediators in the classroom; by providing a more correct and richer education. For example, setting up a multicultural shelf with thematic itineraries, bridge-characters, bilingual books, etc.; providing a plurality of planispheres; having evaluation sheets printed also in bilingual models (Italian/Chinese, Italian/Albanian, Italian/Arabic, Italian/Urdu); disseminating knowledge of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (H. Gardner); preparing a Vademecum for reception and a linguistic First Aid...

In conclusion, there are many reasons to choose interculturality, and there are many ways to achieve it in schools and in society. It is a cultural, anthropological, ethical, political choice. It means rejecting a model of society as a space of separate identities in order to build together a democratic coexistence, the space of the plural and global community.

