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Education, Values and Identities

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Abstract

In the world where many of the traditional values are in crisis and where quite a few identities stagger, follows from the crucial importance of investigation of these processes in close relation with education, to the extent to which this allows to avoid the crises of values or favor the protection of the identities. Perhaps this would allow to establish certain directions and methodological norms that tend to favor the performance of these functions on the part of the educational work. In this sense, more than definitive answers, this paper explores certain problems and stimulates the reflection on these vital issues.

Key words: Education, values, identities, globalization.

In the world where many of the traditional values are in crisis and where quite a few identities stagger, follows from the crucial importance of investigation of these processes in close relation with education, to the extent to which this allows to avoid the crises of values or favor the protection of the identities. Any time we assume how necessary(important) are one and the other questions which will also be worth to discuss as there is no total agreement on this issue –it perhaps would allow to establish certain directions and methodological norms that tend to favor the performance of these functions on the part of the educational work. In this sense, more than definitive answers, this paper will explore certain problems and stimulate the reflection on these vital issues.

In its broad meaning, to educate means to socialize, i.e. to transform the student into a social human being, from the point of view of constructing a particular human community, it is an essential step and the only possible way to make the person a representative and participant of the human kind. For that reason, education constitutes the fundamental mechanism for the formation of a proper identity - a process that leads not only to the self-cognition of the individual as the unique and inimitable personality, but also to the feeling of belonging to human groups that range from the most particular up to the most universal. These groups come from the family, passing to other identities like that of generation, sex, ethnic community, religious affiliation, social class, nationality, unity of civilization, to coming finally to the humankind. The assumption of an identity - so much in its peculiar components, as in those that are shared by certain groups or by the whole human race - means the appropriation of the value system that characterizes it. That's why education, as a mechanism of identities formation, cannot help being at the same time a vehicle-transmitter of values.

Education is compulsory while dealing with children or young people They are educated (in one or another form), whether they like it or not, although it may not be by a conscious intention,

although no particular space or time is designated to do so. The proper coexistence and interaction of the child or youth with his family or with any other human context presupposes an educational relation, which he can contribute to the good formation of the youth or can harm the above-mentioned formation, producing sometimes "poorly educated", which is also a way of education. Only the absence of any form of social coexistence would presuppose the nonexistence of human education (as it has been the case of the children who for diverse circumstances have grown among animals and that precisely due to the educational lack, they never turned in real human beings). Thus, to educate means not only to socialize, but also to humanize, and both presuppose the appropriation of values. In fact the human nature is not a natural attribute inherent in every child born from human father and mother. It means – among other things - an acquired value system adopted precisely via the educational processes in which the human being in the process of personality formation is gained only in the case of coexistence with other human beings. There are the values which, transmitted via education, turn into human ones, for their new bearers. For that reason to educate means to provide the student with a proper identity and, at the same time, to grant him a document of human citizenship. It means to create the harmony between the individual and the specimen. And, between one and the other, education allows the production and reproduction of all the collective identities.

The fundamental support of any identity is the proper human being; but he, in turn, is the carrier of not just one, but of multiple identities which, like concentric circles of different diameters and orbits, possess different generality levels, include and exclude other human beings, they intercept each other. And thus the different identities, that the individual carries, interact between themselves, tinting the form in which they are incorporated into the proper identity. The woman in, say, a Moslem, Catholic or Protestant nation assumes a different identity. In every case, a base identity associated with the contextually predominant religious culture, acts like a prism through which femininity is interpreted. But that at the same time does not mean that femininity itself loses its meaning as attribute identifying the human group symbolized by the woman. The existence of differences and her interior world among nations or religious cultures does hide the woman's identity, the same way as the big variety of existing cultural expressions in a context so diverse as Latin America, for example, it makes the Latin-American identity superfluous.

Certainly, this does not mean that the identities correspond to an unremovable ontological essence or to a fixed repertoire of natural attributes. Only the collective assumption of certain values makes the formation and existence of the above-mentioned identities possible. In general, belonging to a community has in its base various conditional "materials" (for example, to have been born in a certain place, with a certain sex, in the specific family that belongs, in its turn, to some social class, etc.). These factors can favor the assumption of the identities, but they neither predetermine them unilaterally nor are sufficient because they arise and are preserved. The community identity – it is worth to reaffirm it - it is not the result of the conjunction of diverse ontological attributes, but it is the collective and shared experience of the same values. And the only way in which these values become common in a community is via education, be it organized consciously and directed or realized spontaneously by the mere coexistence of different generations. It might be thought then that the identities represent a species of subjective construction which ties an individual or a community to an imaginary community, that its function would take root in distinguishing the given community from others. Probably there are substitutes - with which it has – or it is believed to have - some type of tie and the sustenance of

which consist exclusively of this collectively assumed self-determination will. Before the development of the processes of globalization that presuppose a new type of imaginary, centered not in what distinguishes a few communities from others, but in what they have in common, the conservation of the particular identities might be conceived like an obstacle to the flow of globalization and not as the result of somebody's caprice, but as a real social need for the community. Therefore, some of the postmodern and postcolonial interpretations of the social identities are developed. They are viewed as follows.

The legitimate argument against an ontological comprehension of the identity –that a Mexican is the extract of the native permanent and invariable qualifications that someone might attribute to him–has brought the theoreticians of postmodernism to the extreme point of conceiving the identities without any objective sustenance, lacking in any real foundation, as it is not the subjective and capricious will of those who have invented them. In this way not only the identities as collective assumption of certain valid values for certain community will be “destroyed”, but also the communities themselves that are interpreted inside this conception as pure discursive inventions or narrative strategies of the power. In this way, it would lack sense to speak not only about the national or regional identity, but also about the nations or about the regions, which only would take an imaginary, promoted existence, in this case, as certain political or cultural discourses.

Of the true fact of which the identities presuppose the collective assumption of common values and the feeling of belonging to a community and, therefore, a shared subjective attitude, the theoretical postmodernists deduce its sustenance lack. The subjective thing, the imaginary thing (in which not only the identities, but also the communities to which they refer are included), they would remain something not founded, the not necessary thing, the arbitrary thing, the fictitious thing, the superfluous thing.

But: to what would lead in practice the acceptance of this argumentation that we might qualify as "anti-identical"? The result of all this would be, ultimately, not the victory of a genuine human universality that ends with the differences and, especially, with the big inequality between the different human groups, but the imposition, once again, of the subjective interpretation of this universality promoting certain subjects and that corresponds to a quite concrete identity symbolized by the “western bourgeois white man”. And the worst thing is not the imposition of a unilateral vision, but also of a praxis, as subjective as that which presents itself as a singing of universal siren with the beatific name of “globalization”.

With more or less conscience of the consequences, the postmodern offensive against the identities turns into allied ideological imperial projects. And traditionally identities have been fundamental of the resistance to all types of imperialism. To end with the identities would mean to end mostly with the resistance.

We would like to mention that we don't have to accept either any of the two extreme interpretations, which we might not even qualify as “ontological objective”, which understand the identity as an invariable ontological extract and which it is not capable of explaining its changes and historical adequacies, at the time that it can generate unacceptable forms of fundamentalism; or any other interpretation which we can describe as “subjective relativism”

and not even such interpretations the practical effect of which would be the destruction of identities.

We prefer to focus on the identities as historic products. This implies interpreting of identities not as a set of pre-established ontological feature, but as a changeable, movable value system, subject to certain historical dynamism. Even if they have not so few shared features, of course, for example the identity of the today's Georgian is not the same as that of the Georgian of the Soviet period first of all if they belong to different generations. The important historic events which have happened since then with all probability have left a very important trace in this identity. But to understand historically the identities does not mean either that there is nothing that remains permanent in them, nothing stable and that everything can be reduced to ideas, habits and customs which each generation has to take as proper. It is true that the distinctive sign of identities is the common assumption of the set of values which identify a certain human group, which in turn has expression in a certain subjective disposition shared by its members. Nevertheless, this subjective community is not the result of a capricious will, but, first of all, the axiological expression (termed as subjective values) of social interests corresponding historically as a result of different places to which the certain historic practice has placed to distinct human communities. In this sense, Mexicans, Latin Americans, Cubans, Georgians, Palestinians or the Afghan women as the identities are not the result of mere imaginary constructions, but real human communities shaped historically, with a specific place in the system of social relations, place different from other groups and from which arise as a result divergent interests. As these groups not only have been generated by specific histories, but they also keep on having particular present features, social conditions that stimulated them to arise and continue to reproduce perspective identities which preserve the same socially objective sustenance.

Nevertheless, a relation of automatic determination does not exist between the social conditions that favor the permanence of certain groups or communities and the conservation of their identities. The identities collaborate first of all with conscious processes, with the voluntary assumption of the value system that identifies the community, to make its world view proper, its symbolic world, through the prism of which is the reality interpreted in a certain way. To be born and to live in a community does not mean automatically that we are identified with it. The self-identification will always be an educational result, being spontaneous or guided, and it is going to be dependent on the educational influences that are received.

We might think then that it is not necessary to conceive consciously a type of education that reinforces the identities, since these educational influences will come spontaneously from the same community. But, as we have already indicated, educational influence (favorable or unfavorable to the conscience of identity) involves any human contact, any form of social communication. And today the community dynamics (included the school and other educational instances as the proper family) is far from being the only factor that influences educationally the children and young people. Traditionally formed identities face an invasion of a symbolic world through the means of mass communication – it is principally the television, but also Internet, the radio, the movies, the video - games, the CDs, the DVD - that in general they promote, precisely from the paradigm of the “western bourgeois white man”, a type of world view alien to the one that claims the conservation of the traditional identities and that tends to homogenize everybody culturally . And the worst thing is that this homogenization of the imaginary identities lacks the

social objective sustenance. In other words, globalization does not make us equal, but it sows in our conscience the deceit **that yes we are it.**

There is no doubt that this invasion of the symbolic world is capable of creating a crisis of identities and to deepen even more the process of alienation of the peoples, inculcating to them a world of values completely alien to the realities they live in. The crises of identities is the crisis of values. It is expressed in doubt or perplexity with respect to that what the proper values are or in the discussion of their validity in comparison with other values that seem to excel. Generally speaking, the proper values overlapped in the identity, although incorporated voluntarily, exist automatically, without taking place of the conscious reflection of the individual's nature. When this reflection takes place in the form of doubt, perplexity or discussion, it is a symptom of a crisis of identity. These crises can be associated with different motives. They happen, say, when the individual leaves his original community, is inserted in another one and begins to receive different educational influences of carriers of different values. And it happens also as a result of the process of transition of the community itself. This transformation, in turn, can be the result of a natural historic process of inherent changes in the evolutionary process itself of the community in question, or it can be called a transit submitted to the influence of an exogenous culture which invades immediately or mediately the symbolic world of the indigenous community. In the latter case education can become the participant and the vehicle of the crisis of identity or can act as a species of antidote and of protection of identities. Before the alienated offensive of an imposed culture, the conservation of the identities, via an educational process consciously designed and directed, turns into an essential instrument for the resistance.

Moreover: what does all this involve in a practical, pedagogical sense? How to educate so that to reinforce the values of the identities and to avoid the impact of the aloof flows of the contemporary society? The answers to these questions cannot be offered by only one person, in the limited frames of time and space that we have here at our disposal. I will only make ground for a pair of reflections with the hope that it will stimulate in its turn many others with whom we share educational responsibilities.

First of all, it is necessary to point out that it is not a question of transforming by means of education a nostalgic vision of the past, nor of creation of a useless nostalgia for a present that could be and was not. It would not do other thing but reinforce the feeling of frustration and a certain complex of inferiority, in addition to which it might stimulate a species of fundamentalism, really impracticable and lacking in themselves of legitimacy. Instead of it, one should try to look for in our histories and in the traditional values, all that which is picked out as necessary for the human being of today, for the time that we would use positively the fragility of the current identities to open them for the best values of the contemporary culture, bearing in mind that the desirable course of events does not have to take us to the uncontaminated lack of ideology, but to the full incorporation with proper personality in the international community.

Against what we certainly must put up determined resistance to is the loss of humanism and the vulgarization of life which are increasingly present in the cultural winds that blow from the West. Education in our outline has to be directed to avoid the poverty of axiology of the human being, to raise it over his corporal needs (without disregarding, of course, of giving him the due attention to them), to sensitize it before the human spiritual products, to teach it to perceive the

material consumption less as the end in itself and more as a way for the personal achievement in some creative sphere. After all it would be a question of creation of the concept of life that dignifies the epithet of human, that the consumerism comes out, not only for the human impoverishment that it represents, but for the ecological and social impossibility of its universalization and unlimited deployment.

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