

The Urgencies for Educators in the Society of Knowledge and Globalization in the Context of Dialogue Between China and Italy

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Abstract

This paper analyses the triangle of progressive interactions among knowledge-education-innovation and considers the relationship between societies of knowledge and globalisation, within the framework of the contradictory effects of today's affluence. In presenting these topics, education based on values is assumed as a general interpretive setting. It addresses the urgency of assigning new relevance to teaching in order to achieve a better community life. The philosophical and universalist foundations of education are constantly being overturned by phenomenological reality. It thus becomes necessary to ensure a positive communication between knowledge and experience as an epistemology of the continuity of theory and practice. The capacity to build an honest and flexible dialogue is an indispensable prerequisite for the rectification of social contradictions. Educators are crucial for the creation of the existential space where the individual is the centre of both human development and social progress. The University Zhejiang in Hangzhou offers a unique opportunity to create intellectual bridges between China and Italy enabling a mutual understanding of both cultures, allowing new generations global access to a store of the best resources. In this sense, learning overcomes national boundaries, opening new frontiers to knowledge.

Keywords

Society of knowledge, globalization, educators, higher education; democracy.

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Introduction

Within a contemporary social context, education poses new challenges to educators. Wherever they work (within families, at school, in associations and/or communities), whatever their roles are (as parents, teachers, operators or adults, in general), educators internalise a precise professional profile and create certain expectations in their students. Being an educator is a difficult job that requires a multitude of continuously updated competencies.

The thoughts being presented take three main themes into consideration:

I – Contact between societies of knowledge and globalisation;

II – The contradictory effects of today's affluence;

III – Area of education.

Teaching is assumed as a general interpretive framework for the interpretation of these themes. Concepts of education that question the solutions put forward over the last few decades that openly face current issues are compared through an examination of critical literature. The philosophical and universalist foundations of education are constantly being overturned by phenomenological reality. This, in turn, increasingly necessitates the development of discourse between knowledge and experience. The capacity to make this dialogue learned, precise and flexible represents an indispensable prerequisite for rectifying social contradictions. Persons who educate create the existential space and human depth in situations, which we define as urgencies and educational emergencies.

The world is a single family

This presentation respectfully welcomes the commitment of the University Zhejiang in Hangzhou (China) in opening itself to a comparison with Italy on the subject of education during several meetings on *Knowledge Society and Innovation of Educational Institutions*.

Italy has classically approached China through the narratives found in *Il Milione* by Marco Polo (1254-1324), *Commentari* by the scientist Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), and the studies of Giuseppe Tucci on Chinese wisdom and philosophy (1894-1984). Within this context, it becomes quickly apparent that the China of well-read persons has always been open to communication with culture brought from Italy by merchants, scientists and philosophers.

Ranieri Allulli, in writing about M. Polo, states, “The lesson about things finds him careful and eager to learn. He diligently recorded the products, artefacts, money, religion, language, fauna, flora and climate of each region and city. Preceding modern academics of Eastern religions by centuries, he paraded before us the followers of all creeds and representatives of all Asian sects” (M. Polo, 1954, p. 30).

Matteo Ricci’s Chinese world map, complete with notes, designs, and the history of China’s introduction to Christianity, represents a unique testimony of thought and life in China of the Cinquecento. In *Fonti ricciane* we find, “Religious thought in China prior to the fifth century A.D. was sufficiently complete: God, a single Being, intelligent, personal, provident, omnipotent and omniscient is the foundation of individual, family and national morals; He rewards the good and punishes the bad, not only in this life, but

also in life beyond the tomb, allowing the former to become ministers in His dwelling place and throwing the latter into the region of darkness” (Fonti ricciane, 1942, p. L).

Examining the moral foundations of Chinese society, based on the institution of family, Giuseppe Tucci reads Confucius and notes:

“Society is everything, the individual nothing. Man lives in and for the society, to which he must contribute with the utmost energy. The state Confucius longs for is a reflection of that strict patriarchal foundation that held sway over China during his times. The family is the basis upon which he built his entire doctrine, because those moral virtues, which become the best and most useful civil virtues in practical life, are formed in the family, through obedience shown to one’s parents, affection for one’s siblings and respect for the elderly. ‘There are few devoted children or loving siblings who dare offend their elders’ (Lun Yu I, 2). ‘The world is a single family. This very frequent sentence in Confucian writings shows the importance the master held for the family as an ethical institution. This is why, in the Hiao King, one of the most popular books in ancient China, filial piety is considered the fundamental virtue upon which human society rests and which embodies all other virtues” (G. Tucci, 1922, p. 32) [freely translated].

Max Weber interpreted Confucianism as an ideal kind of society founded on the charisma from which modern, bureaucratic capitalism could not originate; he supplied new comparative reading about the concept of authority and the relationships among religion, education and social development. Education, accurate knowledge and imitation of classic models (meant for mandarins and functionaries) was at the

diametrically opposed to Puritan-like European education, which ruled the world by vocation and sanctified its life.

During this period, the reverse path, from China to Italy, is marked by regular Chinese immigrations. We are aware of the fact that cultures are understood through the study of the traditions from which they originate. We know that the debit with the past is also a reason for renewal; masters teach us to do better and avoid repeating mistakes. Globalisation has opened up borders and created great expectations in all populations. In both Italy and China, knowledge is acquired through educational models that represent constantly developing, precise social processes. Cultural contamination definitely produces breaks in universes of meanings that are no longer sufficient to explain the “whys” of modern man. It is foreseeable that the breaking up of values and the fall of strong references in world concepts will result in a return to forms of coexistence, in which trust, solidarity, care and friendship make up the common fabric of world peace.

I - Contact Between Societies of Knowledge and Globalisation

Knowledge, Education, Instruction

A society of knowledge (or knowledge society) is defined by great fact-finding potential and the implementation of sciences and technologies in struggle for increasingly higher levels of innovation. Developing competences means responding to the challenges of postmodernism.

The Lisbon strategy of 2000 emphasised how Europe should reply to globalisation, by enacting a new, knowledge-based economy. The changes it proposed were meant to help maintain the values of member States and their concepts of society, by 2010. It was necessary to agree to a common programme in order to create learning infrastructures, promote innovation and economic reforms, and modernise social security and educational systems. The knowledge-education-innovation triangle had to function coherently and effectively.

The concrete objective for the new decade was to have this knowledge-based economy become the most competitive, dynamic economy in the world; able to achieve sustainable, economic growth, with new, better jobs, and more social cohesion.

Reaching this objective required a global strategy directed towards:

- preparing the path towards an economy and society based on knowledge by improving policies regarding matters concerning information, research and development;
- accelerating the process of structural reform for the purposes of competition and innovation, as well as completion of the internal market;
- modernising the European social model, by investing in persons and fighting social exclusion;
- sustaining the healthy economic environment and prospects of favourable growth, by applying an appropriate combination of macroeconomic policies, so as to bring the average economic growth rate to approx. 3%.

Verification of an Accredited Development Strategy

On 2 February 2010, the European Commission released an initial document, evaluating the Lisbon strategy, describing a failure to reach the planned objective. The economic growth recorded in the European Union during the 2004-2008 period collapsed following the 2009 fiscal crisis. The gross domestic product (GDP) dropped by at least 4% and unemployment, measured at 7% in 2007, rose to 10% in 2010. In regards to research and development front, the EU understands that, in addition to the United States, Japan and Korea, China and India should also be followed. However, the system of standards remains generally fragmented and slow with respect to technological development. Positive signs are detected in the cooperation among member States and industry through joint partnerships for research and programming between public and private organisations. Competence and intelligence are awarded with increased researcher mobility.

Over the course of the decade of Lisbon strategy application, the market and industry have changed the meaning of labour supply. The new professional profile is that of uniting flexibility with security, by keeping capable workers constantly up-to-date. Knowledge should not be considered a commodity to be statically acquired once and for all. This will, in turn, facilitate innovation with regard to the growth of the most qualified training. Despite this, the concept of *lifelong learning*, and its application during adult training, has a long way to go, yet:

“One of the most important policy developments under the Lisbon Strategy, since its 2005 relaunch, has been the development, adoption and progress with the implementation of common flexicurity principles, endorsed by the European Council in

December 2007. Flexicurity represents a new way of looking at the flexibility and security of the labour market. The concept recognises that globalisation and technological progress are rapidly changing the needs of workers and enterprises. Companies are under increasing pressure to adapt and develop their products and services more quickly; while workers are aware that company restructurings no longer occur incidentally but are becoming a fact of everyday life.

Rather than protecting a job, which will ultimately disappear, flexicurity starts from the assumption that it is the worker who needs protection and assistance to either transition successfully in his/her existing job or move to a new job. Flexicurity therefore provides the right reform agenda to help create more adaptable labour markets and in particular to tackle often substantial labour market segmentation. It is encouraging that a majority of Member States have now developed or are developing comprehensive flexicurity approaches, although the focus of Member States' efforts should now be firmly on pushing forward reforms set out under individual Member States' flexicurity pathways. Major restructuring of Europe's labour markets since the crisis has made the scale of the challenge all the more apparent. Most reforms within this area have tended to focus on easing labour market regulation for new entrants to facilitate more contractual diversity. However, greater flexibility will only be achieved through the reform of legislation on existing contracts and by ensuring transitions between types of contracts and opportunities to progress.

The overall trend in terms of labour market policies has therefore been positive, albeit rather uneven both among Member States and across policy domains. There remains considerable room for improvement, in particular amongst the young and older age groups. Despite progress made in developing the concept of active ageing and avoiding

early retirement schemes wherever possible, older workers are still under-represented in the labour market: the employment rate for people aged 55–64 is more than 30 percentage points lower than that for those aged 25–54, while less than 46% of people aged 55–64 are working compared with almost 80% for 25–54 year olds.

Youth unemployment continues to be a severe and increasing problem. Young people are particularly badly affected by the crisis, and in many Member States they suffer unemployment rates of more than twice the rate for the rest of the work force. Youth unemployment is intrinsically linked to skills policy, and despite some focus on this issue under the Lisbon Strategy, progress has been insufficient. Despite some progress in terms of reducing early school leaving, nearly 15% young people in the EU (or approximately 7 million young people) still leave the education system prematurely with no qualifications. Alongside this, there has been virtually no increase in the average levels of educational attainment of the young, and those who become unemployed often do not receive the support they need. In spite of EU-level activation targets which were set in 2005 and stepped up in 2007, many Member States still fail to ensure that every unemployed young person receives a new start in terms of active job search support or re-training within the first four months of becoming unemployed.

Education and skills policy is at the heart of creating a knowledge-based economy, but it is apparent that the EU has some way to travel in this regard. Progress in increasing youth educational attainment levels has been too slow, with outcomes only improving moderately since 2000. Since 2004, the level of adult participation in lifelong learning has remained stable or even decreased in 12 out of 27 Member States.” (European Commission, 2010, p. 17).

Interdisciplinary Research

Interdisciplinary research is one of the most commonly indicated paths in Europe and also represents a precondition for creating competence. In the debate about a Europe of knowledge in perspective 2020, Joyce Tait (2000), Director of the *Centre for Social and Economic Research on Innovation in Genomics (Innogen)*, University of Edinburgh, defines the types of European research, by dividing them into transcultural, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary disciplines, and their collaboration for the purpose of designing a general cognitive model.

“*Trans-disciplinary research* focuses on processes of knowledge production, rather than the disciplines and subjects into which knowledge seems inevitably to become organised in academic settings, ‘transcending’ the academic disciplinary structure. Trans-disciplinary approaches specifically set themselves apart from discipline-based academic structures.

Multidisciplinary research approaches an issue from the perspectives of a range of disciplines, but each discipline works in a self-contained manner with little cross-fertilization among disciplines, or synergy in the outcomes. It involves low levels of collaboration, does not challenge the structure or functioning of academic communities and does not require any changes in the worldviews of the researchers themselves.

Interdisciplinary research similarly approaches an issue from a range of disciplinary perspectives but in this case the contributions of the various disciplines are integrated to provide a holistic or systemic outcome. The processes designed to achieve this are dependent on the type of interdisciplinary model and the purpose for which it is being undertaken” (n.p).

Of the three, we would argue that the greatest benefit can be found in greater strengthening of interdisciplinary research. Such a strengthening must result in the creation of a general philosophical foundation in which the whole is more relevant than the sum of its individual parts and reading the results can be integral and complete. However, the further development of interdisciplinary research requires both funds and competent researchers (i.e. researchers who undergo ongoing training). As a result, the expansion of interdisciplinary research is an ongoing affair.

European universities are seeking new partners in Asia, extending the hand of cooperation towards China and India and setting up new interdisciplinary teams. The existing model of industry and the private sector partnership is shifting from the regional to the international stage, promising to use the competencies learned in universities and surpass the limits of disciplinary borders.

II – The Contradictory Effects of Today’s Affluence

Education and Spiritual Condition

There is a transformation underway in the European Union and its member States which originates, culturally, from a concept of education that is in a lasting state of crisis. The result of this crisis state is a search for more suitable conceptual solutions which may enable individuals to secure personal well-being during this period.

Many contributions to the search for alternative conceptualizations of education can be traced to Rousseau’s and Pestalozzi’s insights into educating children and persons respectively, the latter of which proposes raising spirits through work. These two

masters have become worldwide references in the field of cultural education and, during the 20th and 21st centuries, some of the central ideas present in their writings have been resumed analysed in much greater depth. Their criticism of static education, sans moral foundation, as conceived up by educators without followers is one of the more interesting such examples. True education is characterized by higher goals of development of the humanity that exists in each individual. Occupational schools, i.e. *Gewerbeschule*, opened by G. Kerschensteiner in Munich and soon scattered throughout Europe, the United States and Asia, were also oriented towards this great task. The activist teaching of the early twentieth century provided an opportunity to map out the theoretical justifications for an educational experience, significant for European culture and more.

The early 1900s in Italy was characterised by women's new theories of education of Montessori, Pizzigoni, Agazzi, and Boschetti Alberti. This teaching united feeling with cognitive development and reconciled ideas with actions and idealism with positivism.

A common fact of twentieth century criticism of the dogmatic school was the creation of another school, on a child's scale, which would be attentive to its spirituality. R. W. Livingston extended this concept to university training, discussing how "intellectual and spiritual confusion" can lead to the decline of moral ideals and weakening of those concepts, religious or otherwise, that had previously contributed to the existence of unity and the creation of civilisation. According to his interpretation, rationalism and liberalism were the primary forces that contributed to the collapse of historic western tradition. Rationalism destroyed without building and liberalism lacked orientation. This resulted in a necessary return to the study of literature, philosophy and religion. The

restoration of values² must counter the well-known crisis of civilisation, the study of cultural Greco-classical heredity³, and the resumption of Christian evangelism which reconciles the two preceding points, equally incorporating secular and metahistorical dimensions. It is necessary to define the general aim of education to avoid the mistakes of both absolute faith in reason and complete trust in freedom.

The Educational Problem of Humanisation

Spranger (1952), for whom knowledge means love of culture, and education is the exercise of self-reflection, self-criticism, conscience and responsibility towards oneself and others, also expressed views regarding the understanding education as the progressive humanisation of the individual. *Taking care of* means culturally understanding the other person through an act of love. The inner reawakening of humanity is the condition for saving man.

King (1970) astutely presented the structural changes to education in the 20th century, while also accurately predicting its fate in the 21st century. Concepts of progress and development were very nearly quashed by the contradictions of a society of wealth and consumerism. Hidden persuaders educated more about school, while teachers were uninspired with scenarios of programme repetitions, lacking knowledge of the means to invent the new world looming over the horizon. Schools must divest outdated controls and accept perspectives of interdisciplinary and international study. Education is a

² Here we employ the phrase "restoration of values" as the confirmation of biblical tradition and its Theocentricism

³ In which anthropocentrism is a central tenet.

lifelong endeavour; everyone should elect to walk the path towards a humanity capable of daily spiritual adaptation. Imagination, enterprise, motivation, and mobility are the fundamental tools that the individuals can employ against routine and inertia. One understands how they may soon supplant traditional manuals, allowing youth to create the present and consider the future. King (ibid) anticipates and envisions the Italian founding of Sciences of Education, through the idea of metaphorical emigration beyond the borders of one's own discipline. In other words, leaving specialisation and opening oneself to the world perspective of education requires rethink oneself as a person and worker in increasingly unlimited ambiences.

Continuity and Evolution of the Crisis

From an analytical standpoint, educational globalisation (as yet not cited by King) works much like urbanisation did in England in the early 1900s. The primary difference between the two can be found in the fact that the spread of globalisation is contemporary and the urbanization's long temporal cycle is thereby nullified. Everything happens concurrently around the world. The is also the case with interpretive concepts of change: the rhetoric of consumerism is replaced with knowledge.

The factors, or forces, which impact transformations are mainly economic in nature. Society and education intervene to justify the economic process. The individual is pushed aside and the great problem of the aims of education tends to turn into learning abilities, measured on their worth, the only ones capable of promoting innovation, certainly not the change.

At this point, we must reacquire an interpretation from symbolic interactionism. In other words, from a global standpoint, culture, society, and the individual interact, creating situations of reciprocal adaptation, which are significant for the forecasted economic framework. These opposing situations on one hand confirm the European strategic objective and, on the other, avoid it. Confirmation occurs when rapprochement among EU member States records functional interdependencies (e.g. a similar educational organisation structure in the various individual States). Avoidance is apparent in their lack of confirmation of the common strategic objective: school leaving and the collapse of markets.

Over several decades, we, as a society, have passed from affirming the value of civilisation to criticising it. This culminated in our arrival at a generalisation of civilisation, according to a competence model unknown to supporters of equal *educational opportunity*, in about 1960. The myth of *common culture* was supposed to replace the past aesthetic tradition's fundamental *corpus* of values. It is now re-read in terms of key competencies and education towards *social awareness*, just as participation in democratic institutions of the 1960s has been revived in the third millennium as civic education for active citizenship (Corradini, 1999).

The crisis of models of education mainly arises with regard to the collapse of security, which, in a climate of lifelong learning, must be directed towards increasingly wider, meaningful horizons (Nanni, 1990, pp. 31-35), without exhausting oneself with conceptual, self-enclosed schematisms. The rapprochement between populations for mutual understanding may include the sharing of common educational paths for teachers (Wang, 2009).

III – Area of Education

Diagnosis and Cure of Urgencies

Categories of urgency and educational emergency have rapidly absorbed much from pedagogic thinking in the last decade. Recurring analyses describe the phenomenon and then put forward possible corrective actions for overcoming dangers. Education is considered the emergency of emergencies (Frabboni, 2001, pp. 5-11). The list of emergencies (i.e., climate, water, hunger, and population) derived from market and mind globalisation also contains the educational emergency, which incorporates the unresolved problem of illiteracy, calculated at ca. 16% by the World Bank, with a relevant emphasis on women. To wit: “Global adult literacy rates improved from 76.2% in 1990 to 83.8% in 2007” and “Globally, more men are literate (88.4%) than women (79.4%). In all regions, literacy rates for men are also higher than for women” (Updated with 2007/08 data in July 2009).

The phenomenon identified is the collapse of meaning in teaching. Adults and institutions are not convincing, resulting in a rise in social behaviours founded on the negligence of the individual. It seems as though injustice, war, and egoism are rewarded more so than justice, peace, and solidarity. Education, however, is a process through which youth are accepted into societies and, whose duty it is to improve. This personal and collective responsibility is not spontaneously born in an individual’s heart; it must be learned. But, the moral depth of coexistence depends on the assumption of this sense of responsibility. Therefore, the challenge of our times is the restoration of education’s value and meaning, initially from an anthropological point of view, which is to say through the existential, socio-cultural reality of today’s man.

According to the educationalist, Giuseppe Vico, the urgency of the educational emergency requires the “recovery of educational rationality” (G. Vico, 2009, p. 21), i.e. a return to *Bildung* directed at listening and attention to culture, which is so charged with expectations and needs. Interpersonal awareness helps us be perceptive and to feel both loved and needed. Employing mutual recognition to feel alive indicates one of the educational paths towards the meaning of being and being-there, a subject closely examined in Martin Heidegger’s *The Concept of Time* (1989).

Existence is the way of being in ‘being-there’ that is equivalent to being possible as possibilities to realise. Being-in-the-world and being-with-one-another, which are characterised as taking care of things and other persons, respectively, are discussed and represent a unitary structure in the writing in *In-der-Welt-sein* and *Mit-einander-sein*. Attention to being-there is the concern of being. The most authentic way of existing, as being-in-the-world and being-with-one-another, overcomes the rough approach of anonymous particularity. We are close one to another. This statement is self-evident. Awareness of the deeper meaning of this living together is both less ascertainable and less manifest. Coexistence is the missing link. While we may learn to live together, we are often unable to coexist. That is, it is frequently difficult for us to find ways for our being man, woman, adult, or child to exist. The fatigue of living may dominate the being until it is reduced to slavery. But what may occur is that the being, in a dash for freedom, goes beyond the difficulty of living and finds the path of human non-brutalisation, thereby increasing the awareness of his/her presence in the world.

Duties of education

Educators and teachers constantly face the problem of defining the duties of education. The speed of modern-day change imposes perpetually restructured aims, by hurriedly exhausting each new intention to educate according to fundamental principles. Their greatest difficulty arises from the common need to give appropriate, credible replies to young people, primarily at school and in the family.

Empirical research on Italian schooling indicates a strong student awareness/appreciation of teachers. In both State and public schools, students aged 14-18 generally appreciate the teaching capacity of their teachers (Chistolini, 2011). In private schools, a survey on youth values showed high self-esteem and adhesion to ethical and religious principles (Malizia & Cicatelli, 2011).

To supporters of suprasensitive order, who have assimilated the transcendent meaning of life, the challenges of education provide an opportunity to bolster the value of their own existential choices. Through transcendence, the concept of emergency is lent support for the duress of modern times.

As things stand we must reflect on the urgent duty of education and, more specifically, two basic educational goals: to orient towards life and to distinguish good from evil. The collapse of certainties and life's profound meanings necessitate a new commitment towards re-establishing the trajectory of truly human values. Every educator addresses him/herself to the individual, whether child, adolescent or young person, as a free human being who is able to assume his or her responsibilities. In this context, this knowledge is also expressed as one's capacity to restore their own human condition values.

One cannot simply *inherit* the values and meanings of a good life and fully understand them, in order to then recreate them in new situations of everyday life. The task of the educator, to be a testimony of love, good, and truth, becomes all the more urgent as human fragility appears to be overtaken by the sufferings of life and the inconsistencies of adults. Hope lends trust in life. Teachers encourage looking for the meaning that gives life a necessary orientation. This is another sign of hope in the rediscovery of the worth of the person and relationships that identify it with oneself, with others, and with society. These include friendships that open us towards care for and listening to those living close to us.

Among solutions indicated by students is an “educational agreement” between parents and teachers (Pasolini, 2010, pp. 79-80). Schools need parents who do not forswear child-rearing and who believe in values on which a society with capable and responsible persons can be founded. Families need teachers whose social role is acknowledged and who are considered allies in building of the educational process.

Formation requires that attention be paid to all of the component elements which make up a person: biological, psychological, social, and cultural. To educate requires introducing individuals to a totality of knowledge in constant movement, which must be updated within a framework of values with which a human being ascertains the extent of the objects of his/her fact-finding investigation and acts in the building of a better society.

Habermas’ (2005) option of cosmopolitan solidarity may enter into the educational plans of schools throughout the world. All cultures have common denominators (e.g. the duty to abstain from crimes against humanity and wars of oppression). Intercultural

learning opens one to understand meanings and religious and non-religious worlds, believers and non-believers, and leads to dialogue for peace and human rights among worldwide civilisations.

In teaching, the actively seeking cultural encounters represents the substance of dialogue among world views that are open to constructive comparison for the enrichment of knowledge with universalistic depth (Laeng, 1985). The challenge to education lies in the capacity for recognizing the common human root, which, notwithstanding the diversity of language and vocation, in the ultimate sense, remains an objective toward which to educate, in addition to being an inherent need in the human condition.

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