

Welcoming speech. Educational policies and paths of interaction

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The city of Bari is evidently no longer just a physical space, but a symbolic and decisively important one too, now that the Mediterranean has placed such a challenge on education, the process of formation and, above all, educational policies. Our Faculty of Educational Sciences has been concentrating on the role of sociological disciplines during the students' formation, paying particular attention to the whole subject of Sociology, specifically the Sociology of Education. We consider Sociology of Education a fundamental field for the training of competent future educators, psychologists, trainers, teachers and media experts.

We are really pleased to highlight that the Faculty of Educational Studies is rich in courses and professional profiles. For example, during the academic year 2011-2012, it delivered five BA in the fields of Educational Science, Communication Studies and Psychology and six MA (such as Clinical Psychology, Pedagogical Sciences, Adult Education and Lifelong Learning) plus a five-year degree in Primary Education for teaching in kindergarten and primary schools. Each one of these degree included courses of Sociology, particularly of Sociology of Education, so that more than thirty courses of Sociology took place last year at our Faculty.

This is the consequence of our belief that the Faculty of Educational Sciences should be the cultural place in which to offer the dialogue that is constantly asked for and expected by the new generation: a dialogue that

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promotes the comparisons between different types of educational systems and leads us to accept new ideas and wider perspectives, leaving behind other narrow local or national perspectives.

All around Europe new forms of illiteracy – such as the incapability to use information technologies both in everyday life and at the work place –, the monopolization of natural resources and the unfair distribution of wealth have accentuated the phenomenon of marginalization. As a consequence a deeper division arose between the Northern European States and the Southern Mediterranean ones.

In the upcoming decades the European Union will most likely remain an important immigrants' intended destination. Eurostat projections indicate that approximately 40 million people will emigrate to the European Union by 2050. The processes of educating and making the adults literate represent, therefore, a commitment which must be a priority and cannot be avoided for the years to come. This is because Europe and the Euro-Afro-Mediterranean Basin face changes that will have a noteworthy impact both on society and the economy of the future and, consequently, on needs in education and training materials.

The challenges which need to be faced concern the rules of democracy, citizenship, demographical changes, integration into society and the labour market. It is therefore essential today, and it will continue to be so as the number of immigrants entering the country continues to increase in the coming years, that our society become capable of understanding the flow of immigration and the diversity of its components and be able to handle it efficiently. Only an in depth knowledge that avails itself of the appropriate tools and concept will allow us to comprehend the complexity of this phenomenon, which has recently been pointed out by the “Arab Spring”.

Solving this predicament is not only a matter of knowing how to deal with this new illiteracy and avoid it creating a dangerous category of “second-class” citizens, a challenge which in itself brings up serious questions to be answered. Conversely, it is a matter of using the talent, know-how, education and skills young immigrants bring with them to help them to build a dignified life that is gratifying – something they could not achieve if they had remained in their countries where economies and

political situations made it impossible for them. A society able to appreciate the talents immigrants bring with them is the only one that can welcome immigration as a resource to be developed. Programs must be created that truly concentrate on integrating immigrants into society through further studies and work, not just by calming tensions between citizens and the new immigrants.

As far as the principle that we are all equals implies the rejection of any form of abuse of power and violence towards other human beings, its cornerstone should be not integration, but rather *interaction* (Zagrebel'sky). Interaction principle means offering safety conditions, protection and defense of immigrants' dignity until they are able to become integrated into society and create relationships beyond their native community.

Recent events in nearby Mediterranean countries, which share similar traditions and history, and the importance of new generations have on society, must be considered. The Faculty of Educational Sciences cannot ignore and must pay attention to this topic in the hope that our students are able to look beyond their close reality and become more open-minded and aware of what is different.

Franco Cassano has often spoken of this philosophy of pluralism in his monographs: it requires patient work towards increasing communication between the different cultures so that they can understand one another. Education must know how to recognize the dynamics of this time and accept the challenges that come along so that history bears the mark of our choices to build the common good.

The best investment that can be made for the future is to reinforce study and educational, sociological, and psychological research, while diminishing the existential scarcity that afflicts us and the aggressiveness that threatens us.

Of course a cross-cultural perspective must be aware of the vastness of the dimensions involved. Only if multi-disciplinary competences – which range from social to psychological, from economical to anthropological, from historical to educational ones – will cooperate, a cross-cultural attitude will be legitimate and succeed. We need to open our mind towards plurality and translate this attitude operatively into the capacity of getting

the different disciplines to work together in order to understand the complexity of our world.

Concerning this point, a significant stimulus emerges from the study of the Mediterranean world. As Fernand Braudel taught, Mediterranean is a space that has been progressively built as a single unit through the historical intertwining of different cultures. Each one of the Mediterranean cultures has been at the same time typical of a place yet interwoven to the other ones, in the same way as material life of people all around Mediterranean coasts has been autonomous but bound to what has happened in other Mediterranean societies.

We must rediscover, therefore, the “Mediterranean Community” as a place where it is possible to meet each other and dialogue, where people can share and cooperate. Allowing people to become “unite in diversity” requires new scientific tools, sensibility towards education and the ability to accept other people as participants in a dialogue who have the same rights as we have.

The Mediterranean, therefore, reveals itself as a complex challenge on many levels: scientific and disciplinary, but also, in a deeper sense, educational and civil.